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"Even the Little Things Matter:" a Phenomenological Study On Factors Impacting Student Motivation During and After COVID-Related Disruptions in Education

Jennifer Ferris-Crisafulli

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by

Jennifer Ferris-Crisafulli

Bachelor of Arts
University of Delaware, 2013

Master of Arts
University of Delaware, 2015

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Accepted by:

Todd Lilly, Major Professor

Terrance McAdoo, Committee Member

Elizabeth McCluskey, Committee Member

Suha Tamim, Committee Member

Cheryl L. Addy, Interim Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my beloved grandmother, Irene Seyffarth, one of my first teachers who instilled in me a lifelong love of learning, and now my guardian angel. I would not be who I am today without her support and encouragement over the years. She never missed a single recital, concert, play, or graduation, and I know she is by my side in spirit as I reach this milestone.

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic brought about unprecedented disruptions in education, as schools were forced to make a rapid transition to virtual learning in March 2020. Students' motivation seemed to decline significantly during and after this virtual learning period, which ranged from months to over a year in various areas of the United States. This study seeks to understand the factors impacting student motivation during and after this virtual learning period.

This action research study was conducted using a qualitative, phenomenological approach. Data was collected from open-ended surveys and semi-structured interviews during Spring 2021 and Spring 2022. Data was analyzed through the lenses of self-determination theory (SDT), sociocultural theory (SCT), and social contagion theory. This study found that major factors impacting student motivation stayed relatively consistent between the 2020-21 and 2021-22 school years. The most critical factors impacting student motivation were relationships, a sense of helplessness resulting from pandemic-related educational disruptions, and a desire for structure and consistency.

Implications of this study suggest that many factors impacting student motivation are in the scope of teachers' control. This study also has implications for the emerging body of scholarship on change and continuity in student motivation during and after pandemic-related educational disruptions.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

When I began my journey as a teacher-investigator several years ago, I was interested in investigating factors influencing student motivation. Having taught at two vastly different charter schools – one in rural Delaware and the other in northeast Philadelphia – I was struck by the similarities I perceived among students in regards to their motivation, particularly the impact relationships with teachers have on motivation. I originally hoped to analyze the effects of an intervention using student-centered instruction to foster greater student motivation among the ninth-grade students in my World History classes. Those plans came to a screeching halt in March of 2020 as schools across the United States shuttered their doors and were forced to make a hasty transition to distance learning in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Schools in more affluent regions were able to make this transition more smoothly than those in urban areas, as these schools were more likely to have the resources needed to supply every student with an internet-ready device, and families were more likely to have the privilege of reliable internet access (Bacher-Hicks, et. al., 2021). At my school, a public, Title I charter school in Northeast Philadelphia (which will be given the pseudonym "Philadelphia Academy"), the transition was more difficult. As 89% of students at Philadelphia Academy are considered socioeconomically disadvantaged, numerous families did not have reliable internet access, let alone a device that students could access class materials from. In addition, many families had multiple students

attending Philadelphia Academy, and therefore needed multiple devices and enough bandwidth to allow for simultaneous Zoom meetings. Instruction all but stopped for two weeks as Philadelphia Academy worked to secure and distribute as many devices as possible.

For the remainder of the 2019-20 school year, all assignments were asynchronous, and no mandatory live instruction sessions were held due to inequities in internet access. (In comparison, the School District of Philadelphia (SDP) made all assignments optional for the remainder of the school year.) This disruption in the continuity of education – coupled with massive civil unrest in Philadelphia in the wake of the murder of George Floyd – had a profound impact on the students I taught. Incomplete work was commonplace. Very few students took advantage of optional Zoom check-in and tutoring sessions. Emails to students often went unanswered. In response, teachers worked with guidance and the Philadelphia Academy emotional support team to make individualized plans for each student failing classes, which at one point included over 60% of the freshman class of 2019-20. My students were clearly struggling, and my research would have to wait.

Philadelphia Academy started the 2020-21 school year with a full-virtual model. By this time, the school had been able to make arrangements with the City of Philadelphia and Comcast to get adequate internet access to families who needed it. Philadelphia Academy had secured grants to buy hundreds of new Chromebooks to distribute to each student. Daily virtual instruction via Zoom became mandatory, with the exception of Wednesdays, which were asynchronous. Google Classroom was used as the primary virtual learning platform. On Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays,

students followed a shortened bell schedule (classes were shortened from sixty minutes to forty minutes).

By February 2021, the City of Philadelphia deemed it was safe enough to start allowing students back into school buildings, at which point Philadelphia Academy transitioned to a hybrid model. Due to the physical limitations of the building, only a small number of students could attend in-person instruction with proper social distancing measures. Special education students, English language learners, and students failing more than three classes were prioritized for two in-person cohorts, which were comprised mostly of ninth and twelfth graders. The largest number of in-person students I had in my classroom during the hybrid period of 2020-21 was ten, while the total number of students in that class was thirty-three. Hybrid cohorts came into the building two of five days per week – either on Monday/Thursday ("Blue Cohort") or Tuesday/Friday ("Gold Cohort"). Wednesdays remained asynchronous. Because we never were able to implement a hybrid plan that allowed all students to receive some in-person instruction, I never met the majority of the students I had in my classes during the 2020-21 school year face-to-face. I had never heard many of their voices or seen their faces, as it was not a school-wide requirement for students to keep cameras on or microphones unmuted, and most students chose not to.

Despite the impersonal, distanced nature of the 2020-21 school year, I did manage to build positive relationships with many students. Relationship building was more intentional for me than it had ever previously been in my teaching career, as I did not have the benefit of physical proximity or unstructured time with my classes. Instead of emphasizing content as I normally would, I dedicated more instructional time to social-

emotional learning. I asked my students to fill out a daily survey which gave them the opportunity to tell me about their feelings about school-related and personal lives if they wished to share. I dedicated warm-ups to reflective questions and class discussion, which also had the effect of building rapport and personal affinity in the online setting.

I noticed that as my relationships with students grew, their completion of assignments and participation in class improved. I also noticed that when several academically at-risk students returned to in-person learning, their performance significantly changed, and quite quickly – students used class time more effectively, completed assignments in a more thorough and timely manner, and participated more frequently in class discussions. Observing these changes made me think back to my research, and I became invested in investigating student motivation during and after the period of remote instruction from March 2020 to June 2021. I knew that such an inquiry was imperative to my own teaching practice as I looked toward helping students reacclimate to the school environment in the 2021-22 school year and beyond.

However, what I had predicted in terms of student motivation did not always come to fruition when students returned to in-person instruction for the 2021-22 school year. Class participation, assignment completion, and students' emotional affect – all which may be considered observable proxies of motivation (Skinner & Belmont, 1993) – seemed low. Because I had been encouraged by students' improvement in motivation during hybrid instruction in 2020-21, I was a bit surprised that student motivation did not recover as much as I hoped it would. I began to wonder what factors impacting student motivation during the virtual period continued to affect students after returning to in-

person learning, and what new factors could also be affecting their motivation as they adjusted to a "new normal."

Problem of Practice

The first reported case of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) was in Wuhan, China in December 2019. By March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic. The disease was highly contagious and often lethal, especially for the elderly and individuals with compromised respiratory or immune systems. In nations around the world, hospitals were overwhelmed with COVID-19 patients. In the United States, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommended aggressive mitigation measures, including social distancing of at least six feet, mask wearing, and limiting indoor gatherings (Chaplin, 2020).

Days after the WHO's announcement, several American states issued stay-at-home orders. After The City School District of the City of New York – the largest district in the nation – announced that it would close to curb the spread of COVID-19, many other districts in the region followed suit (Taylor, 2021). This included the School District of Philadelphia (SDP), which closed its doors on March 13, 2020 for an initial two-week period. It soon became clear that COVID-19 would be around for much longer than two weeks as officials optimistically hoped, and by the beginning of April 2020, SDP determined that schools would stay closed for the remainder of the academic year. As Philadelphia Academy reports to SDP's Charter School Office, Philadelphia Academy followed SDP's decisions on school closures.

As the deadly COVID-19 pandemic gripped the world and people shut themselves inside, schools faced the herculean task of ensuring continuity of education while school

buildings were indefinitely closed. Despite the best efforts of educators, absenteeism among students across the nation was at an all-time high (Blad, 2022; Esquivel, 2022; Burney & Duchneskie, 2022). To make matters worse, rates of absenteeism were already at a concerning level before the pandemic, with chronic absenteeism highest among Black and Hispanic/Latinx students (US Department of Education, 2019; Blad, 2022). These trends were certainly evident at Philadelphia Academy, which has a predominantly Hispanic/Latinx student population (US News & World Report, 2021).

Concerned about high levels of absenteeism and students' apparent reluctance to complete work, teachers across the nation desperately turned to each other for advice, wondering how they could help students improve their motivation, all while feeling not unlike their students – depleted, unmotivated, and stressed (Ozamiz-Extebarria, et. al., 2021). Educators hoped these trends would improve with the adoption of "hybrid" learning models in the 2020-21 school year. In hybrid models, students are split into two groups, one online and one in-person, and receive simultaneous, live instruction from one teacher. The idea is to allow for some in-person instruction while maintaining some mitigation factors to curb the spread of COVID-19. Despite studies that suggested hybrid models foster greater student motivation (Lin, 2008), students still seemed stuck in a digital, socially distanced rut.

Special education students and English language learners especially suffered with virtual and hybrid models. For special education students, the disruption in routine, lack of structure, and inaccessibility of resources during the virtual period were barriers to academic success (Fleming, 2020). Most experts agree that the achievement gap between students in special education and their mainstream peers will continue to widen as a

direct result of the switch to virtual learning even after a transition back to full in-person learning (Jones, 2020). Students in special education also tended to exhibit less classroom engagement than their peers, as these students often do not have the support and resources they need at home that they would normally receive in school (Pinho, 2020).

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to study factors influencing student motivation during and after the period of distance learning necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The study will examine change and continuity in these factors. The questions guiding this study are as follows:

1. What factors impacted students' perceptions of their motivation during emergency remote instruction?
2. What factors impacted students' perceptions of their motivation after returning to in-person instruction?

As this is a phenomenological study, I focus on students' perceptions of their motivation rather than observable proxies of motivation. This is because phenomenology seeks to understand participants' own experiences of a phenomenon in their own terms (Dukes, 1984).

Theoretical Framework

This study integrates three interconnected theories: sociocultural theory, self-determination theory, and social contagion theory. A thorough overview of connections among these theories is given in Chapter 2.

Sociocultural Theory

Sociocultural theory (SCT) is most closely associated with the work of Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky. SCT views learning as an inherently social process (Vygotsky, 1978). It is concerned with the ways in which social interaction and social context influence an individual's cognitive development. This theory takes into account both one-on-one, interpersonal interactions as well as the broader social, historical, and cultural context that influences these interactions (Lemke, 2001). SCT centers the importance of scaffolding by a more knowledgeable other, who is often a parent or teacher (Vygotsky, 1978). It also centers the importance of cultural tools, or semiotics (Vygotsky, 1981).

Self-Determination Theory

Self-determination theory (SDT) provides a framework for understanding both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Put forth by Richard Ryan and Edward Deci (1985, 2000a), SDT posits that an individual's motivation is connected to their innate psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Respectively, these refer to the sense of being in control of one's own behaviors and goals, an ability to master a given set of skills, and a sense of community and belonging. SDT also places a major emphasis on interrogating social and cultural factors impacting a person's needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Because of this, SDT has important overlap with SCT.

Social Contagion Theory

Originating in the fields of sociology and social psychology, social contagion theory provides a framework for understanding collective behavior, or how individuals

behave in groups. This theory also looks at social influence, or an individual's ability to affect cognitive or behavioral change on others (Benson & Gresham, 2007). Social contagion theory is based primarily on the work of sociologist Gustav LeBon (1895), Robert Park (1921), and Herbert Blumer (1969) who discussed the concept of social contagion, or the ways in which behaviors, emotions, or cognitive phenomena spread throughout a group, which has been likened to "the same way as diseases [spread] during epidemics" (as cited in Benson & Gresham, 2007, p. 245). In the wake of the proliferation of the internet and social media, there has been a renewed interest in social contagion theory among social scientists and educators (Gladwell, 2000; Christakis & Fowler, 2013; Vishwanath, 2015).

Researcher Positionality

Herr and Anderson (2015) state that it is vital for the researcher to address his or her positionality, or relationship to the research subjects and setting, as "clarity about [positionality] is necessary for thinking through issues of research validity or trustworthiness" (p. 37). As a teacher-researcher working with my own students, my positionality is that of an insider reflecting on my own self-practice. All participants in this study were recruited from the classes I taught at Philadelphia Academy during the 2020-21 and 2021-22 school years.

With this, as I create, deliver, and assess my own curriculum, I must be keenly aware of the "common mistake… to treat one's personal and professional self as an outside observer rather than as an insider committed to the success of the actions under study" (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 41). At times, my positionality will be that of an insider collaborating with other insiders when I work with my colleagues in my school's

special education department to design student-centered lessons, assignments, and assessments affording high levels of student choice and voice. Because of the nature of my positionality, I have opted to use first-person pronouns throughout this study, as Herr and Anderson (2015) contend that using third-person is "typically a sign that the action researcher… lacks a fundamental understanding of the epistemology of the insider action researcher" (p. 42).

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative, phenomenological study approach. Most importantly, this study is also considered action research, as its purpose is to allow me, the researcher-practitioner, to refine my teaching practice in my own educational setting. It is important to note that action research, by design, is an ongoing process, and the implications gleaned from this study will inform both my own pedagogy and future research endeavors (Efron & Ravid, 2013).

Context

The research setting is located at "Philadelphia Academy," a public charter school in northeastern Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The school serves 1,220 students from kindergarten through twelfth grade. A Title I school, 89% of Philadelphia Academy students are considered socioeconomically disadvantaged and are eligible for free or reduced lunch (US News & World Report, 2021). 74% are considered to be living in poverty conditions. As of the 2021-22 school year, 74% of the student population is Hispanic/Latinx, 14% is Black, 2% is Asian/Pacific Islander, 1% is white, and 9% are multiracial (The School District of Philadelphia, 2022).

Participants

This study had two focal groups of participants: a 2020-21 focal group and a 2021-22 focal group. Students in both focal groups were recruited from the classes I taught at Philadelphia Academy. Participation in the study was voluntary and open to any student in my classes during both school years. Parent/guardian consent was obtained for participation (see Appendix A).

For the 2021-22 focal group, participants were recruited from my ninth grade World History classes. Students were given the option to complete a questionnaire as an extra credit assignment. Responses from this questionnaire were analyzed to create the semi-structured interview script. Students who completed the questionnaire were then given the option to participate in a semi-structured interview in lieu of an exam grade, which was authorized by Philadelphia Academy school administration. Thirty-two students completed the interview and questionnaire, and a representative sampling of six students was chosen to be the subjects of a phenomenological study: three males, two females, and one non-binary student. Two participants were Hispanic/Latinx, two were Black, and two were multiracial. One student was an English language learner (ELL) and one received special education services for a specific learning disability in mathematics (SLD).

During the 2021-22 school year, I became interested in differences in motivation between students who had commenced their high school careers during or after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and those who had commenced them before. For this reason, I recruited students from both my ninth grade World History classes and my AP Psychology class, which included both eleventh and twelfth grade students. Just like the

previous focal group, students were given the option to complete a questionnaire as an extra credit assignment, which was updated to reflect my interest in change and continuity in motivational factors during and after COVID-related disruptions in education. Students who completed the questionnaire were then given the option to participate in a semi-structured interview in lieu of an exam grade, which was again authorized by school administration. Twelve students – six ninth graders, four eleventh graders, and two twelfth graders – completed both the questionnaire and interview. A representative sampling was again chosen from the 2021-22 focal group to include in the phenomenological study. This representative sampling included two ninth graders, three eleventh graders, and one twelfth grader. Of these six students, three were female, two were male, and one was non-binary. Three students were Hispanic/Latinx, two were multiracial, and one was Black. Like the previous year, one student was an English language learner (ELL) and one received special education services for a specific learning disability (SLD) in reading.

Ethical Considerations

Confidentiality was maintained through ensuring that student data remains anonymous and deidentified. Pseudonyms are used in place of students' names, and only students' ages, genders, and racial/ethnic identities are identified. As mentioned previously, a pseudonym ("Philadelphia Academy") was also used for the name of the school to further protect student data. All data was encrypted and stored on a password-protected computer only accessible to the researcher and to Philadelphia Academy administration. As all but one of the participants were 18 years of age or younger, parent/guardian consent was obtained for students to participate in the study, both for

surveys and interviews. The study received IRB approval from the University of South Carolina and from the Board of Philadelphia Academy. As per the IRB, this study is considered minimal risk for the participants.

Data Collection

Qualitative data was gathered through surveys and individual, semi-structured interviews. For both the 2020-21 focal group and the 2021-22 focal group, the survey consisted of eleven items, ten open-ended questions and one scaled question (see Appendices B and D). The ten open-ended questions asked students to reflect on their conceptualizations of motivation, the impact of virtual learning on their motivation, and the settings and circumstances in which they felt most motivated. For the scaled question, students were asked to indicate their level of anxiety regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. A twelfth, optional open-ended question asked students to elaborate on what contributed to this anxiety or why they did not experience anxiety. In alignment with best practices in qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), this first round of data collection with surveys informed the script for the semi-structured interviews, which were conducted two weeks after the survey was administered. The survey was administered as a Google Form via Google Classroom.

Survey data informed a script for semi-structured interviews (see Appendices C and E). During the 2020-21 school year, the semi-structured interviews were conducted over Zoom, with a few exceptions, as a small number of students were present for in-person instruction. Only audio was recorded for Zoom and in-person interviews. Interviews ranged in length from twenty-four to thirty-three minutes.

A similar survey was used during the 2021-22 school year with changes and additions to account for new questions that arose from the first focal group's data and to account for the transition back to in-person learning. Students were asked to reflect on their experiences during the 2020-21 school year and compare them with their experiences during the 2021-22 school year. Again, students who completed the survey were given the opportunity to participate in an interview in lieu of an exam grade. Interviews were conducted after school and were audio recorded. Interviews ranged in length from thirty-one to thirty-six minutes.

Data Analysis

In alignment with a phenomenological approach, qualitative data collected from surveys and interviews were analyzed through an inductive coding process, in which the researcher extrapolates themes from the data itself, rather than imposing themes onto the data from preexisting theories (Mohajan, 2018). As in any qualitative study, the purpose of the coding process was to "bring meaning and order to the mass of collected data by looking for recurring themes, categories, and patterns" (Hatch, 2002; Shank, 2006, as cited in Efron & Ravid, 2013).

Significance of the Study

As this is an action research study, this study will benefit the participants by allowing me, the teacher-researcher, to reflect and improve on my own teaching practice (Efron & Ravid, 2013). Therefore, the findings of this study are most relevant to the local research setting, or Philadelphia Academy. Most existing studies on the impact of socioeconomic factors on student motivation have been conducted with college-level students. While there is a fair amount of literature on the impact of the COVID-19

pandemic on student motivation, there is still an emerging body of scholarship on change and continuity between differences in student motivation during and after COVID-related disruptions in education.

Limitations of Study

Considering the fact that this study was conducted during a period of unprecedented disruptions in the educational process due to COVID-19, there are many limitations and considerations that need to be addressed. Due to city mitigation measures, not all students were allowed into the building in-person, and therefore, most student interviews needed to be conducted over Zoom. I did not require student-participants to turn on their cameras during Zoom interviews because only audio was recorded. I therefore did not have the benefit of analyzing student-participants' body language during interviews. Conducting interviews over Zoom also presented challenges in terms of internet connectivity. In numerous interviews, the connection briefly dropped multiple times – a commonplace scenario in the realm of online learning. It is also important to note that there could also be potential biases arising from studying my own practice, which I attempted to minimize by thoroughly interrogating my positionality throughout the research process.

Organization of Dissertation

This dissertation will be organized into five chapters as follows:

Chapter 2: Literature Review This chapter will provide a comprehensive and detailed review of the literature pertaining to relevant theories and bodies of knowledge, including: sociocultural theory (SCT), self-determination theory (SDT), mindset theory, and social contagion theory.

Chapter 3: Methodology This chapter will thoroughly explain methods of qualitative data collection as pertaining to this phenomenological research study.

Chapter 4: Research Findings and Interpretation of Results This chapter will explain the coding and processes used for data analysis as well as presenting the findings of the study on students' perceptions of motivation during and after educational disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations This chapter will discuss the implications of the findings of this study on my own practice and existing bodies of knowledge on student motivation. Based on these conclusions, it will also suggest areas for future research.

Glossary of Terms

COVID-19: Refers to a highly contagious disease of the respiratory system caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which was first discovered in humans in 2019. By March 2020, this virus had caused a pandemic that necessitated stay-at-home orders and the closure of most public places across the world (Chaplin, 2020; World Health Organization, 2021).

Virtual/online/distance learning: Learning experiences in synchronous or asynchronous environments in which participants use different devices such as desktop computers, laptop computers, tablets, or smartphones to access class materials and interact with the instructor and peers (Dhawan, 2020). The terms "virtual learning," "online learning," and "distance learning" are used interchangeably in this study.

Hybrid learning: An educational model that combines online and face-to-face (FTF) instruction that was adopted as a means to mitigate potential exposure in schools during the COVID-19 pandemic (Lin, 2008; Gnaur, et. al., 2020).

Charter school: A public school that operates independently of but is overseen by a local education agency (LEA).

Title I: Refers to a school or LEA that serves a high number of students from low-income families and qualifies for financial assistance from the federal government to help students meet state academic standards (US Department of Education, 2021).

Autonomy: In self-determination theory, the basic psychological need of being in control of one's choices and having the experience of choice (Deci & Ryan, 1991; Ryan, 1995).

Competence: In self-determination theory, the basic psychological need of the individual to demonstrate or feel they possess sufficient qualities to effectively deal with their environment (Deci & Ryan, 1991; Ryan, 1995).

Relatedness: In self-determination theory, the basic psychological need of having a sense of belonging, either belonging to a group or having meaningful relationships with others (Deci & Ryan, 1991; Ryan, 1995).

Social contagion: Refers to the involuntary "catching" of behaviors and attitudes across connected individuals (Levy & Nail, 1993).

Social contagion of motivation: Explains how the motivation of a target person spreads to the perceiver (King, 2020).

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

As discussed in Chapter 1, this study seeks to identify factors that have impacted students' perceptions of their motivation during and after a year-long period of remote instruction necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Of course, the COVID-19 pandemic brought about unprecedented disruptions and changes to education. During the 2020-21 school year, most American students spent a considerable amount of instructional time online as virtual learning became the new norm. As students' time away from the school building increased, rates of absenteeism dramatically increased (Kurtz, 2020) and students were clearly disengaged and unmotivated (Tan, 2020). As educators looked towards a return to in-person instruction for the 2021-22 school year, the prevailing attitude was that student motivation would recover, albeit gradually (Bauld, 2021). Educators soon found that the in-person 2021-22 school year in many ways was tougher than the largely virtual 2020-21 school year. Student motivation was still low despite the efforts of schools to help students embrace a new "normal" (Corpus, et. al., 2022).

At my own school, a public, Title I charter school in northeast Philadelphia, these trends were certainly evident. I wondered why students performed better in some classes but not in others, why they would participate for some teachers but not others, and how the pandemic was impacting their lives, and conversely, their performance in school. Considering the demographics of my school and the unique needs of the student population we serve, this problem of practice seemed well suited to action research.

Research Questions

Based on the literature and connections to relevant learning theories – self-determination theory, sociocultural theory, and social contagion theory – I developed two central research questions to guide my study:

1. What factors impacted students' perceptions of their motivation during emergency remote instruction?
2. What factors impacted students' perceptions of their motivation after returning to in-person instruction?

Purpose and Process of Literature Review

The purpose of any literature review is to situate the study in the body of existing scholarly knowledge on the topic. In an action research study, the literature review serves to connect the problem of practice and intervention with "the broader knowledge about teaching and learning" (Efron & Ravid, 2013, p. 17). The literature review allows the researcher-practitioner to identify central terms and concepts within the topic they are examining, and these terms and concepts are used to drive the narrative of the study (Efron & Ravid, 2013). Similarly, Herr and Anderson (2015) describe the function of the literature review as a "conceptual framework that guides the data gathering" (p. 84). This conceptual framework provides the justification for the chosen intervention for the study, as well as the methodology that is to be used (Efron & Ravid, 2013; Herr & Anderson, 2015).

To compile this literature review, I used the process suggested by Efron and Ravid (2013), which begins with an initial identification of central terms and themes in

my topic. Based on my understanding of relevant theories and concepts, I created a concept map to connect related terms and themes to examine further. Once I identified these terms and themes, I "develop[ed] a list of synonyms for [my] keywords" (Efron & Ravid, 2013, p. 20). Identifying these synonyms would be crucial in my search for relevant literature.

I then conducted a database search, using the University of South Carolina's library databases, including JSTOR, ERIC, and ProQuest. Using these tools, I was able to compile a robust reference list, mostly comprised of journal articles, books, and a few online sources from reputable organizations or institutions. Examining these materials was crucial to my understanding of motivation. The literature review process also allowed me to ground my study in a robust theoretical framework, which includes three interconnected theories: sociocultural theory, self-determination theory, and social contagion theory. Understanding the problem of practice in the context of this theoretical framework also enabled me to better understand social justice implications of this study – namely, how this study relates to issues of equity and access in education, particularly for students receiving special education services and for English language learners.

Theoretical Frameworks

Sociocultural Theory

Sociocultural theory (SCT) is based primarily on the work of Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1978), who posited that social interaction and social context play a crucial role in an individual's psychological development. SCT views learning as "human social activities conducted within institutional frameworks" (Lemke, 2001, p. 296). Learning does not just occur in the context of one-on-one interpersonal interactions;

it occurs on a broader scale. Every human interaction is the result of socialization, which occurs throughout the lifespan in numerous institutions. These institutions include family, religion, occupation, school, and even online communities (Lemke, 2001). One-on-one interactions are important, though; there is an interdependence between individual and social processes in learning. As learners interact with others, they gain new knowledge and strategies (Scott & Palincsar, 2013). Interactions in the context of learning are not a top-down transmission of information and skills from the more knowledgeable other to the learner. SCT also acknowledges the contributions of the learner to the interaction (Tudge & Schrimsher, 2003).

The inherently social process of learning is facilitated by a "more knowledgeable other," often a parent or teacher (Vygotsky, 1978). A learner must be guided by a more knowledgeable other in order to bridge new knowledge with their existing knowledge. This area of developing knowledge is called the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Vygotsky (1978) defined the ZPD as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem-solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86). Stated simply, the ZPD is the difference between what an individual can do on their own and what they are able to do with support from others. This is the "primary activity space in which learning occurs" (Shabani, 2016, p. 2).

In order for teachers to truly understand how students are progressing, they must observe how students work in the ZPD. Sociocultural theory suggests that if a student is able to complete a task with some help from others, the student will be soon able to complete the task independently (Yildirim, 2008). Vygotsky (1956) maintained that two

children who can both independently complete a task do not necessarily have the same potential development. While one child may be able to complete tasks that are two years above their level with some help from a more knowledgeable other, the other child may only be able to complete tasks that are a half-year above their level (Vygotsky, 1956). This illustrates why teachers must assess students' learning process; this is how they are able to determine which processes are developing (Yildrim, 2008).

According to SCT, learning does not occur through direct interaction with the environment, but through the use of semiotics, or cultural tools (Vygotsky, 1981). Tools may be physical or symbolic (Lantolf, 1994). In the context of education, physical tools include tangible items such as textbooks, teaching materials, and educational technology (Shabani, 2016). An example of a symbolic tool is the language spoken in the classroom (Noormohamadi, 2008). The behavior of others in the classroom is also considered a symbolic tool (Donato & McCormick, 1994). A combination of physical and symbolic tools is needed to transmit information to the learner:

> …education (a leading activity of many cultures) incorporates both physical and symbolic artifacts, including books, paper, pencils, computers, language, numbers, diagrams, and so forth, and has the goal of helping students develop coherent concept-based knowledge of the world (Lantolf, 2006, p. 69).

With that, it is important to note that both physical and symbolic tools are products of human culture, and just as human cultures do, tools change over time. Tools are modified before being passed down to the next generation (Lantolf, 2001). These "tools of intellectual adaptation" serve the purpose of enabling individuals to adapt to the society they are part of (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky (1978) maintained that the most important

tool of intellectual adaptation is language. It is through language that people are able to communicate with others and thereby construct their notions of reality (Smagorinsky, 2007).

Applications of SCT in Education

SCT holds that learning is by necessity a collaborative process. SCT-informed instruction seeks to support students in engaging in interactions and using tools that are relevant to the subject matter being taught (Scott & Palincsar, 2013). Teachers should be attentive and responsive to students' personal meanings, mediating them with their peers' meanings and the meanings of the broader discipline (Scott & Palincsar, 2013). Teachers should also use questioning not just to elicit correct answers, but to provide students with the opportunity to articulate reasons and explanations (Mercer & Howe, 2012). When students are able to meaningfully participate in the learning environment without being made to feel unable or deficient, they are more motivated (Shepard, et. al., 2018).

Students are also more motivated when teachers incorporate students' everyday practices into instruction. Moll, et. al. (1992) suggested that teachers tap into students' "funds of knowledge" in the classroom in order to foster greater motivation. In a study on students in a working-class, Mexican community in Arizona, Moll, et. al. (1992) found that classrooms were "encapsulated" from the rest of the community and social networks, and teachers seemed to disregard the wealth of knowledge and skills students gained from sources outside of school. For example, many students acted as a translator for their families, helping them with legal documents, contacting outside institutions, and with other bureaucratic processes. Students therefore had language skills teachers did not

account for. Moll, et. al. (1992) state that when teachers tap into "funds of knowledge," they help to break down harmful stereotypes about underserved groups.

In a similar vein, Lee (1995) discussed how cultural background knowledge impacts reading comprehension among African-American students. According to Lee (1995),

> The influence of cultural background knowledge on reading comprehension is particularly problematic for students whose home language or language variety differs markedly from the mainstream standard dialect that is taught in most schools in the United States and that is reflected in the canon of literary texts taught in most secondary schools (p. 611).

To address this inequity, Lee (1995) suggests that teachers use a process of scaffolding, or a cognitive apprenticeship, which was originally introduced by Collins, et. al. (1991). The goal of a cognitive apprenticeship is to elicit dialogue or behavior that signals the acquisition of complex thinking strategies (Lee, 1995).

Building further on the concepts of "funds of knowledge" and the cognitive apprenticeship, teachers should mediate students' primary and secondary discourses. Primary discourses refer to the ways in which students interact with others at home, in their communities, and in other informal social settings. Secondary discourses are those that are endorsed in formal social settings, such as the school or workplace (Scott & Palinscar, 2013). Gutiérrez, et. al. (1999) suggested that teachers work to develop "third spaces" in the classroom, in which primary and secondary discourses are merged. Gutiérrez, et. al. (1999) maintain that the "third space" is a zone of development, building on Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the ZPD.

Self-Determination Theory

One of the three major theoretical frameworks grounding this study is self-determination theory (SDT). Influenced by humanistic psychology and pioneered by Richard Ryan and Edward Deci, SDT is a theory of motivation and personality which holds that a person has basic psychological needs that must be met in order for them to feel motivated (Moss, 2018). According to Deci and Ryan (1985, 1995, 2000a), these basic needs are autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Respectively, these are the sense of being in control of one's own behaviors and goals, an ability to master a given set of skills, and a sense of community and belonging.

SDT maintains that an individual's behavior – an observable proxy of motivation – can be explained by the degree to which their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are being met. When all of these needs are met, an individual will authentically and meaningfully engage in activities, since they will perceive these activities as enjoyable, and therefore, interesting or important. Using an example of a person who chooses to learn an instrument of their own volition rather than via outside coercion, Deci and Ryan (2000b) explain that "need satisfaction, which in this case means experiences of autonomy and competence, is necessary for the enjoyment of the activity" (p. 230). So, for an individual to perceive something as enjoyable, they need to feel that they are acting on their own desires to engage in the activity, and that they are proficient in their performance of the activity. Deci and Ryan (2000b) further posit that an individual's innate needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness affect which desires are most important to them, as these needs create an internal hierarchy or priority

of desires. As the child develops, they begin to assimilate or internalize others' priorities, which affects this internal hierarchy (Kackar-Cam & Schmidt, 2014).

SDT explains the connection between these three main psychological needs and intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation. Ryan and Deci (2000a) explain that "The most basic distinction is between intrinsic motivation, which refers to doing something because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable, and extrinsic motivation, which refers to doing something because it leads to a separable outcome" (p. 54). In his research on human motivation, Deci (1972, as cited in Sheldon, Williams, & Joiner, 2003) found that people who were paid to assemble a puzzle were less likely to engage in similar activities of their own volition in the future. However, people who were not paid to assemble the puzzles – people who were driven by intrinsic motivation – were more likely to later seek increasingly challenging tasks on their own. This suggests that intrinsic motivation is more powerful than extrinsic motivation in promoting self-efficacy, which helps to explain why organisms would engage in behaviors that do not offer tangible external rewards or have the possibility of external punishment (Sheldon, Williams, & Joiner, 2003). Numerous studies have suggested the needs of autonomy and competence sustain intrinsic motivation, while extrinsic motivation is most useful when the need of relatedness is not being met (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009).

Autonomy refers to an individual's need to feel that they are *choosing* to participate in activities from a place of agency (Gagné & Deci, 2005). It is important to note that autonomy is not necessarily synonymous with independence, nor is it the opposite of dependence. In the context of SDT, to be autonomous is to perceive oneself as "being the perceived origin or source of one's own behavior" (Ryan & Deci, 2002, p.

8). Autonomous individuals perceive their behavior as being a true expression of the self (Ryan & Deci, 2002).

Teachers can support students' autonomy by providing them with choice in the learning process, thoroughly and earnestly communicating the rationale and value of tasks, and engaging in dialogue with students (Reeve, et al., 2014). This is in direct contrast to controlling teaching strategies, which have the effect of suppressing students' sense of autonomy. Controlling teaching strategies include making threats of punishment or actually punishing students for undesirable behavior, using sarcasm, and talking to students more than listening to them (Reeve, 2002; Reeve, et al., 2014). This is supported by a study by Sheldon, Williams, and Joiner (2003), which examined primary students' motivation through the lens of SDT, suggested that when students' need for autonomy was thwarted through teachers' "overbearing interpersonal control," students' desire for learning was diminished (p. 24). Other teacher behaviors that undermine autonomy are providing students with solutions prematurely, not giving students sufficient time to solve or reflect on a problem, using criticism, and enforcing strict deadlines (Reeve, Bolt, & Cai, 1999; Reeve & Jang, 2006).

Competence refers to one's sense of being effective in their social environment, as well as the perception of having ample opportunities to exercise and express this effectiveness (Ryan & Deci, 2002). A person who feels competent will seek opportunities to maintain and improve upon their skills (Ryan & Deci, 2002). On the other hand, a person who does not feel competent will avoid or refuse to engage in a task that they feel is too difficult. For instance, a student who feels a book report is too challenging may not

complete the task (Moss, 2018). Therefore, students whose sense of competence is unmet may avoid or resist certain tasks or activities.

Because competence is socially constructed, social adaptation is crucial to this basic psychological need. Kokkonen, et al. (2020) found that students who exhibit higher levels of pro-social behavior have a greater sense of competence than those who exhibit more anti-social behavior. Pro-social behavior is defined as "voluntary, socially positive behaviors benefitting others and positive peer interaction such as comforting, helping, and cooperation," whereas anti-social behavior refers to behavior that is disruptive, impulsive, and maladaptive (Kokkonen, et al., 2020, p. 2). Kokkonen, et al. (2020) found that teaching strategies emphasizing cooperative learning and pro-social behavior help to improve students' sense of competence. Teachers can also promote students' sense of confidence by providing them with positive and constructive feedback and structured guidance (Kusurkar, Croiset, & Ten Cate, 2011).

The final basic psychological need as articulated by SDT, relatedness, refers to the individual's need to have a sense of interpersonal connectedness and belonging (Vallerand, 2000). This sense of connectedness includes both caring for and the perception of being cared for by others; having a sense of belonging to a group and to the wider community; and being genuinely liked, appreciated, accepted, and valued in a particular social setting (Ryan, 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2002; Moss, 2018; Kokkonen, et al., 2020). It is also important to note that feelings of connectedness and belonging must be secure in order for the individual's need of relatedness to be adequately met (Ryan & Deci, 2002).

School is one of the most important – if not the most important – social environment in students' lives. So, for students to be motivated in school, they must feel a sense of community and camaraderie at school. Teachers can support students' need for relatedness by expressing warmth, caring, and respect to students (Ryan & Niemiec, 2009). Concrete ways that teachers can do this is by providing students with emotional support, acknowledging and empathizing with students' perspectives and struggles, engaging in dialogue with students, and giving students advice (Kusurkar, Croiset, & Ten Cate, 2011; Ten Cate, Kusurkar, & Williams, 2011; Williams, Saizow, & Ryan, 1999).

Applications of SDT in Education

Studies have shown that when students' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are supported, there is greater "academic engagement and better learning outcomes" (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009, p. 134). As mentioned previously, teachers can support these basic psychological needs in a variety of ways, many of which overlap with supporting more than one of the three needs. For instance, teachers who consistently consider student perspectives, provide relative learning materials, and providing students with choices in the learning process help to support their needs of both autonomy and competence (Williams, Saizow, & Ryan, 1999). These two needs can also be supported through the teacher providing positive feedback to students and being mindful to minimize pressure students feel to complete tasks (Levesque, et al., 2004).

Kackar-Cam and Schmidt (2014) found that high school students' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness were all improved through involvement in community-based service-learning. They found that two factors influencing students' sense of autonomy were social interactions and whether or not they voluntarily

participated in service opportunities. According to Kackar-Cam and Schmidt (2014), students who were participating in service-learning due to school mandates reported perceiving less gains in autonomy than those who participated of their own volition. Kackar-Cam and Schmidt (2014) also suggest that social competence is harder to build than a sense of competence in other areas, such as practical or mechanical skills:

> This task-related difference in feelings of competence can be attributed to the more immediate outcomes of the construction work which provided adolescents with physical evidence for their accomplishments, as opposed to more social outcomes of relationship building which might have emerged relatively more slowly (p. 102).

Kackar-Cam and Schmidt (2014) also observed that students' awareness of and work towards a common goal has the effect of increasing their sense of relatedness.

Social Contagion Theory

Social contagion theory, which draws its origins in sociology and social psychology, explains collective behavior, or how individuals behave in groups. Collective behavior is driven by social influence, which refers to an individual or group's ability to affect significant cognitive or behavioral change (Benson & Gresham, 2007). In social contagion theory, behavior and attitudes can spread through a social group like biological pathogens. Malcom Gladwell (2000), who famously wrote about social contagion for the *New Yorker*, argues that the spread of ideas and messages "behave[s] in much the same way as diseases spreading during epidemics" (p. 245). With that, social contagion is a form of social influence that refers to the involuntary "catching" of behaviors and attitudes (Levy & Nail, 1993). Contagion is driven by similarities and

mutual affinity among individuals (Ryan, 2001), which is connected to the SDT concept of relatedness. However, emerging research on social networks has challenged previously accepted models of contagion that likened the spread of ideas to an epidemic. This is because the ways in which people consume social media have evolved, resulting in people having a more active role in choosing which messages to consume and share rather than being passive consumers of information passed through groups they are in (Hodas & Lerman, 2014).

Behavioral contagion, or the spread of observable behaviors from one person to another in a group, was the phenomenon originally described by French sociologist Gustave LeBon (1895), who was among the first to theorize about group behavior in a scientific sense. Like many other scholars of his day, LeBon (1895) was interested in how seemingly ordinary individuals could buy into a social program of violence and destruction *en masse* after the numerous instances of widespread political turmoil in eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe. LeBon (1895) likened the spread of ideas in a group to the spread of disease – a "mental infection" (Locher, 2002). In his prolific book, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*, LeBon (1895) refered to this phenomenon as "contagion." Considering that LeBon (1895) compared human social patterns to epidemics, it is unsurprising that he had a largely unfavorable view of human nature and crowds, contending that any time a crowd coalesced, people act differently and less intelligently (Locher, 2002). According to LeBon (1895), when people become part of a psychological crowd, the following occurs: (1) individuals feel invincible and anonymous, (2) behavioral contagion occurs, and (3) members of the group enter a state of suggestibility, meaning they are not conscious of their own behavior (Locher, 2002).

Unlike other early sociologists who focused on group behavior in specific temporal or geographic contexts, LeBon (1895) kept his analyses more theoretical, which allowed them to be generalized more broadly (Locher, 2002).

Sociologists Robert Ezra Park and Herbert Blumer later expanded on the concept of collective behavior. Park (1921) defined collective behavior as "the behavior of individuals under the influence of an impulse that is common and collective, an impulse, in other words, that is the product of social interaction (p. 38). Both Park and Blumer believed that all group activity can be considered collective behavior. Unlike Park, Blumer distinguished between routine collective behavior and elementary collective behavior. While the interaction of teachers and students in a classroom can be considered an example of routine collective behavior, elementary collective behavior happens in response to social unrest (McPhail, 1989). Routine collective behavior occurs because "people have common understandings and expectations" of that particular social context, such as the expectations of behavior in a classroom (Blumer, 1939, p. 168). However, when social unrest occurs, people are unsure of how to act. Sociologist Émile Durkheim (1893) called this phenomenon *anomie*, meaning "without norms" or "normlessness."

According to Blumer, after an "exciting event" occurs, which precipitates social unrest and *anomie*, four subsequent stages of group behavior occur. In the second stage, people engage in milling behavior, in which they try to make sense of the exciting event by interacting with others (McPhail, 1989). In the milling stage, people are extremely emotionally aroused and highly sensitive to one another (Locher, 2002). The third stage is "the emergence of a common object." In this stage, the group's interpretation of the exciting event eclipses all individuals' own interpretations, and the individuals lose their

"normal capacity to use language or imagery to formulate alternate images" of what occurred (McPhail, 1989, p. 410). That is, the group's interpretation of the exciting event becomes the predominant interpretation, which impacts individual behavior. In the fourth and final stage, individuals are ready and willing to act upon whatever common impulses the crowd has. This is driven by social contagion, which Blumer (1939) described as a form of "collective excitement" (p. 176).

Wheeler (1966) later expanded on LeBon's theory of behavioral contagion, arguing that there are four specific conditions that must be met in order for behavioral contagion to occur. Firstly, the initiator and the follower must be in a similar situation or mood. The initiator's behavior then starts a cognitive process in the follower, in which the follower examines their own condition and desires to change it. The follower also realizes that imitating the initiator's behavior has some kind of benefit or may help to solve a conflict. Finally, the initiator is assumed to be a positive reference model (Wheeler, 1966).

In contemporary social science, the concept of social/behavioral contagion has come to refer to the "spread of mood, attitude, and behavior from one person to another or from one person to a whole group" (Ogunlade, 1979, p. 205), or from an initiator to a follower. For something to be considered social contagion, it must spread to at least two people within the same social network in a short period of time (Rosen & Walsh, 1989). Social/behavioral contagion is also related to the concept of *social influence*, which refers to the process by which a person's attitudes, behavior, or cognition changes due to the impact of another (Cialdini & Griskevicius, 2010).

Applications of Social Contagion Theory in Education

Numerous studies have examined best practices in education through the lens of social/behavioral contagion. Most research in elementary and secondary education has focused on students with emotional-behavioral disorders, or on implications for students' mental wellbeing. A study by Barth, et. al. (2004) showed that the more aggressive students are put together in a classroom, the more instances of aggressive behavior occur. This goes for both students who are classified with an emotional-behavioral disorder, as well as students who are not. However, there does not seem to be any lasting impact of social contagion on aggressive behavior in subsequent years. Studies by Moyer and Nelson (2007) and Prinstein, et. al. (2010) found that social contagion is a significant factor in the alarming rates of non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI) among adolescents.

Numerous studies have illustrated social contagion of motivation in education as well. A famous study by Ware and Williams (1975) explored what has come to be known as the "Dr. Fox Effect," which posits that teachers who deliver lessons with more enthusiasm foster better academic outcomes than those who delver lessons in a more apathetic manner. In a similar vein as Ware and Williams (1975), a study by Wild, et. al. (1992) suggested that students who believe their teachers are intrinsically motivated, rather than extrinsically motivated, are more likely to report higher levels of satisfaction and enjoyment in the learning process. In this study, Wild, et. al. (1992) recruited thirty-five undergraduate students without prior musical training to take piano lessons. Students were assigned to a piano instructor. Half of the students were told that their piano instructor was a volunteer, and the other half were told that their instructor was being paid. The piano instructors were not made aware of what their students were told

regarding their motivation. Wild, et. al. (1992) found that students who believed their instructor was a volunteer, or that the instructor was intrinsically motivated to teach, reported greater enjoyment of the learning experience, which translated to a better mood in their lives overall. These students were also more likely to pursue further learning and to practice during their free time than their peers who believed their teachers were extrinsically motivated with monetary compensation.

Negative dispositions and affects can also be transmitted from teacher to student. Oberle and Schonert-Reichl (2016) investigated the link between teachers' burnout levels and students' physiological stress response among 406 seventh-grade students and their teachers. Oberle and Schonert-Reichl (2016) measured teacher burnout levels using the depersonalization subscale and the Maslach Burnout Inventory modified for teachers. Students' physiological stress levels were assessed through measuring the free cortisol levels in saliva, which were measured three times in one day (beginning of the school day, lunch, and end of the school day). Ultimately, Oberle and Schonert-Reichl (2016) found that students who are taught by a teacher reporting higher levels of stress and burnout tended to exhibit more physiological signs of stress themselves.

Connections Among Theoretical Frameworks

These three theoretical frameworks – sociocultural theory, self-determination theory (SDT), and social contagion theory – were chosen due to their overlapping nature and important links. SDT is connected strongly to both sociocultural theory and social contagion theory (see Figure 2.1 for an illustration of these connections).

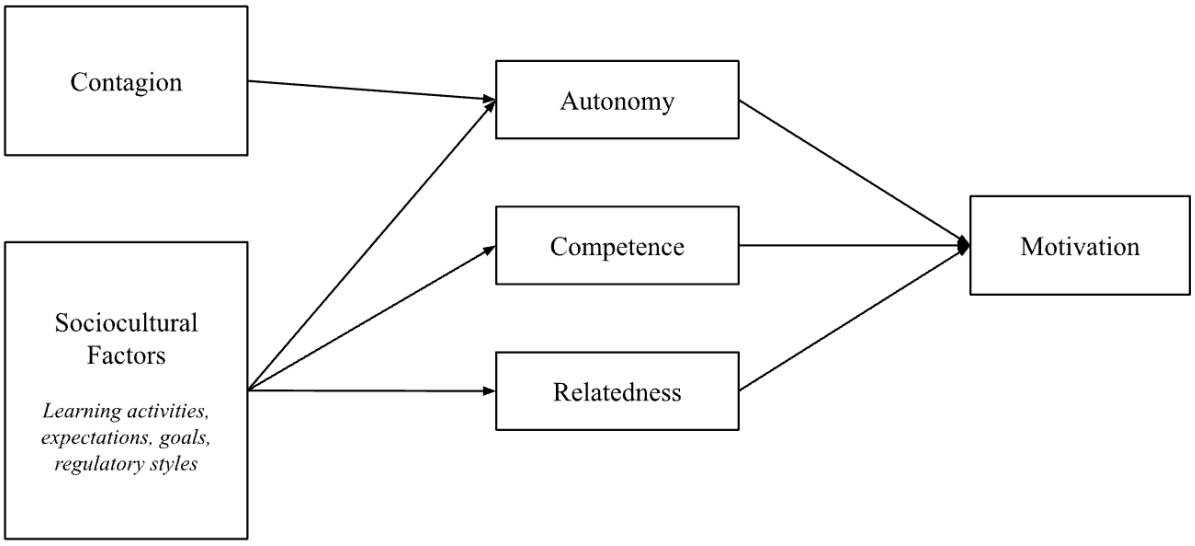

Figure 2.1 Connections Among Theoretical Frameworks

Self-Determination Theory and Sociocultural Theory

Numerous scholars have discussed the sociocultural influences on student motivation through the lens of SDT. These influences include learning activities, expectations, goals, and regulatory styles (Reeve, et. al., 2018). The ways in which teachers present these sociocultural influences impacts students' psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. For example, teachers may foster student autonomy by giving them options and input in learning activities (Jang, et. al., 2016). When presenting expectations, teachers should utilize scaffolding as a means of "competence support" (Koestner, et. al., 2012). Giving students the opportunity to work together addresses their need for relatedness (La Guardia & Patrick, 2008). Although sociocultural factors can influence all three major psychological needs, SDT researchers identify autonomy support as the "key sociocultural force that predicts variance in students' educational outcomes" (Reeve, et. al., 2018, p. 33).

Sun and Chen (2010) have explicitly discussed connections between SDT and Vygotskyan theory. Vygotsky (1978) maintained that learning occurs in a group setting, or when an individual is part of a learning community. Vygotsky's theory is therefore strongly connected to the concept of relatedness (Sun & Chen, 2010).

Self-Determination Theory and Social Contagion Theory

Radel, et al. (2010) have discussed the links between SDT and social contagion theory, particularly in terms of contagion and autonomy. School is an inherently social environment, and one of the greatest factors impacting student behavior – a proxy of intrinsic motivation – is social relationships (Burgess, et al., 2018). Another social factor impacting students' intrinsic motivation is their interactions with teachers, which are impacted by whether or not teachers adopt autonomy-supporting strategies (Radel, et al., 2010). Studies have shown that students are able to perceive the motivation of their teachers, and teacher motivation has a considerable impact on student motivation (Atkinson, 2000). Teachers that are most likely to use autonomy-supporting strategies are teachers who are intrinsically motivated themselves (Pelletier, et. al., 2002).

Not only can observable behaviors be transmitted through the process of social contagion, patterns of cognition can also be transmitted. While most studies have investigated the contagion effect among students and their peers, this effect has also been observed between teachers and students. According to Burgess, et. al. (2018):

> The contagion effect observed between teachers and students may not be led by the same mechanisms as peer influence, but nevertheless can be considered as another manifestation of social contagion in education (p. 166).

With that said, teachers' motivation – or perceived motivation – can influence that of their students. This effect ties together social determination theory (SDT) and social contagion theory, as social contagion of motivation can be understood through the lens of cognitive evaluation theory, a sub-theory of SDT. Cognitive evaluation theory holds that as social beings, humans need to participate in events in which others support elements of personal autonomy. If an individual's autonomy is supported, they are more likely to be intrinsically motivated. Intrinsic motivation is characterized by enjoyment, exploration, creativity, and engagement (Wild, Enzle, & Hawkins, 1992; Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Studies on Student Motivation and Technology

Numerous scholars have argued that use of technology is associated with improved student motivation, as measured through observable proxies of behavior and through numerical grade data. While scholars agree that technology has many benefits for student motivation, they acknowledge that technology should be used purposefully and in moderation. Technological difficulties can be frustrating for students, which could have the impact of decreasing their motivation.

Ayari, et. al. (2012) contend that technology improves student motivation because it keeps students alert, and alertness can be understood as an observable proxy of motivation. In their study on improving student motivation in mathematics through use of educational technology, Ayari, et. al. (2012) noted that students who completed online mathematics homework were more likely to delve into independent study and to perform higher on formative assessments. However, Ayari, et. al. (2012) warn that technology should be used "with moderation," as a mix of online and in-person activities is ideal to "catch students' attention and follow up on students' improvements" (p. 411).

Glover and Miller (2001) found similar trends in their study of the effects of technology on student motivation. For this study, Glover and Miller (2001) interviewed sixteen staff members and nine Year 8 and Year 9 students at a secondary school in the United Kingdom. They found that using technology allowed teachers to better differentiate their instruction and to reflect on their teaching practice, which had the perceived effect of improving student motivation in their classes. Teachers observed that students were more willing to "assume the role of teacher" themselves when provided with lessons that integrated use of an interactive whiteboard (Glover & Miller, 2001, p. 265). Teachers believed that technology-rich lessons attracted students' interest more than traditional, pen-and-paper lessons. However, teachers did note that use of technology could be demotivating for students in certain circumstances, particularly when glitches or difficulties occurred (Glover & Miller, 2001).

A study by Mistler-Jackson and Songer (2000) also demonstrated that use of technology is associated with improved student motivation when used consciously and appropriately. In their investigation of a sixth-grade online science curriculum, Mistler-Jackson and Songer (2000) argued that using technology endows students with more opportunities for communication and collaboration, and also provides them with more authentic lesson activities. These aspects have the effect of increasing students' self-efficacy and sense of empowerment, which in turn, improves their motivation. Like Ayari, et. Al. (2012) and Glover and Miller (2001), Mistler-Jackson and Songer (2000) noted that there are caveats to this. In accordance with sociocultural theory, Mistler-Jackson and Songer (2000) state that use of technology must be properly scaffolded in order for students to feel motivated when using technology.

Studies on Student Motivation During the COVID-19 Pandemic

While strategies to mitigate disease were nothing new in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic presented an unprecedented problem in modern education – the issue of distance learning. Schools struggled to keep students engaged and in attendance as they tried to maintain continuity of education. Absenteeism and drop-out rates rose drastically. A large body of scholarship exists on the connection between absenteeism/drop-out rates and student motivation.

Many scholars agree that a sense of community and belonging is a major factor in sustaining student motivation. Numerous studies have pointed to a sense of belonging predicting behaviors that indicate high motivation, such as academic effort and amount of time spent on homework (Smerdon, 2002; Hagborg, 1998). In an important implication for my school, in which 74% of students are Latino, Sánchez, et. al. (2005) point to relationships and a sense of belonging as the most important factor sustaining motivation among adolescent Latino students.

In a study on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on South African students' motivation, Mthalane, et. al. (2021) point to several contributing factors to low student motivation and subsequent drop-out trends. Many students had personal and familial commitments on top of completing school work and felt overwhelmed by learning how to use an unfamiliar online format on top of attending to their other obligations. Without the opportunity for face-to-face interaction, students were less likely to seek guidance from instructors. Students also experienced a "lack of belonging" and found it difficult to form relationships with their teachers and peers (Mthalane, et. al., 2021). Looking to SDT, it is clear that students' psychological needs of autonomy (not being able to balance

conflicting commitments), competence (feeling confused and unable to receive help), and relatedness (being deprived of relationships in the learning environment) were not being met. Indeed, scholars have noted that SDT lends itself particularly well to studying the effects of distance learning because all three major psychological needs – autonomy, competence, and relatedness – are affected (Chen & Jang, 2010).

A study by Ilić, et. al. (2021) found that students' self-confidence in their academic knowledge and skills decreased as a result of COVID-19-related disruptions in education. As self-confidence is related to the concept of competence (Harrison, et. al., 2015), this study can be viewed through the lens of SDT. Ilić, et. al. (2021) measured dental students' self-confidence through a self-reported questionnaire. The questionnaire asked students to rate their confidence in seven areas of dentistry on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being the least confident and 5 being the most confident. Compared with the confidence levels of students who graduated in 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic, Ilić, et. al. (2021) found that students who graduated in 2020 felt significantly less confident. Ilić, et. al. (2021) contributed this to the abrupt switch to distance learning and lack of face-to-face contact with patients. The implications of this study for high school students is that face-to-face learning is associated with higher self-confidence – or sense of competence – than distance learning.

Pelikan, et. al. (2020) conducted a study on student motivation during the COVID-19 pandemic using the framework of SDT. The authors noted that the most successful students during emergency distance learning were those who already exhibited high intrinsic motivation. These students tended to be more persistent as opposed to procrastinating. Pelikan, et. al. (2020) found that perceived autonomy and perceived

competence were more important than perceived social relatedness for sustaining intrinsic motivation. They did not observe a positive relationship between perceived social relatedness and persistence. Pelikan, et. al. (2020) contend that this could be because socializing took students' focus away from learning rather than being a productive means of learning.

Yamin and Muzaffar (2021) found that psychological wellbeing contributed greatly to student motivation during the COVID-19 pandemic. Yamin and Muzaffar (2021) measured psychological wellbeing using the Academic Motivation Scale (AMS) and the Psychological Wellbeing Scale (PWB), which they administered to 278 university students in Pakistan. They found that students with low intrinsic motivation tended to have a lower degree of psychological wellbeing. They attributed this to several reasons connected to SDT:

> …amotivation is playing a significant role on psychological wellbeing of students during this time as students may be annoyed or frustrated in quarantine because they are unable to meet friends or not accustomed to this method of online studying… students amid pandemic might be experiencing low sense of academic control due to shift in mode of education from traditional to online teaching (Yamin & Muzaffar, 2021, p. 8).

Yamin and Muzaffar (2021) also contend that face-to-face interaction is associated more with extrinsic motivation than intrinsic motivation. With that, social contagion may be a factor contributing to students' extrinsic motivation, and something that should be considered in the context of distance learning and the return to in-person instruction.

Rahm, et. al. (2021) found that medical students' motivation improved when distance learning provided them with close to real-life scenarios. Rahm, et. al. (2021) gathered self-reported data from 198 medical students who participated in an online, symptom-based lecture series in the summer of 2020. The study found that the most important factors promoting motivation were interactivity, media and design, repetition and deepening of knowledge, practical aspects, and fun. It is important to note that the online lecture series was developed by a group of medical students who had already completed the program, which lent itself to the student-centered nature of the online lecture series (Rahm, et. al., 2021). This study relates to the SCT concept of extending the ZPD through tools the learner feels competent in using. Knowledge was passed from more knowledgeable others (the more senior students) to the learners through a tool that the learners perceived as accessible and culturally relevant. The Rahm, et. al. (2021) study underscores the need for students to be able to see the relevance of a tool in order for the tool to be successfully used to transmit information.

Aramati Casper, et. al. (2022) used SCT as their framework for a study examining factors impacting student motivation. The study sought to identify sociocultural influences on student motivation during the COVID-19 pandemic. Data was collected from 514 university students across four institutions. Aramati Casper, et. al. (2022) found that some of the most important sociocultural factors negatively impacting student motivation were living with multiple other people, general angst about COVID-19, general angst about the economy, lack of a consistent place to work, and concerns about finances. They found the most important academic factor negatively impacting student motivation was the online format for class. Aramati Casper, et. al. (2022) suggest that the

switch to distance learning was too abrupt for students to learn to adjust to a new reality. While many of the factors impacting student motivation were out of the universities' control – such as anxiety related to the economy and the virus – universities could have focused more on preparing students to build collaborative peer support networks, a central tenet of SCT (Vygotsky, 1978).

Chapter Summary

This chapter laid out an overview of theories and literature relevant to the study. Sociocultural theory (SCT), self-determination theory (SDT), and social contagion theory make up the theoretical framework for this study, and connections among these three theories were explained. This chapter also examined previous studies on the impact of technology and the COVID-19 pandemic on student motivation, which provide valuable insight for expectations and patterns to be anticipated in this study.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter discusses in detail the methodology used to understand the experiences of students whose learning was impacted by unprecedented disruptions necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic, namely that of emergency distance learning during the 2020-21 school year and its subsequent impacts on the educational process. Research design, participants, and instruments for data collection are reviewed. The chapter also discusses ethical considerations and methods of data analysis used.

Problem Statement

During the COVID-19 pandemic, students across the globe faced unprecedented disruptions to their education. This was especially true for students in urban schools, who tended to face more complex and pervasive challenges than those in more affluent, suburban schools. Numerous studies have shown that students of lower socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to face obstacles in their education that affect their attendance (Ready, 2010), which were exacerbated by the pandemic (Klein, et. al., 2020). Researchers found that these conditions widened the achievement gap between students of higher and lower socioeconomic statuses and predicted that these gaps would be more pronounced after the return to in-person instruction (Sosu & Klein, 2021).

Students in urban schools spent more of their 2020-21 school year online than students in suburban schools. This was due to higher COVID-19 transmission rates prevalent in cities (Varma, et. al., 2021). In Philadelphia, the city where I teach, the

majority of students received virtual instruction for the entirety of the 2020-21 school year. A small number of students were selected to come into the building for hybrid instruction starting in March of 2021. In-person instruction did not resume for all students until the start of the 2021-22 school year. During both the 2020-21 and the 2021-22 school years, chronic truancy became an epidemic in and of itself. According to a study by the Los Angeles Times, nearly half of students in the Los Angeles Unified School District – the second-largest school district in the United States – were chronically absent during the 2021-22 school year (Esquivel, 2022). (Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing ten percent of school days or more (Blad, 2022).) The Los Angeles Times found that absenteeism was highest among students of color. In Los Angeles, 57% of Black students were chronically absent, and 49% Hispanic/Latino students were chronically absent (Esquivel, 2022). The Philadelphia Inquirer reported that chronic absenteeism reached as high as fifty-seven percent among students in the Camden City School District during the 2019-20 school year, up from thirty-four percent during the 2018-19 school year (Burney & Duchneskie, 2022). Data collected by the New Jersey Department of Education showed that chronic absenteeism was highest in districts with higher percentages of socioeconomically disadvantaged students, and was particularly high among charter schools serving these students (Burney & Duchneskie, 2022). Chronic absenteeism is important for understanding student motivation, as school attendance can be understood as a proxy of motivation (Moore, et. al., 2008).

At Philadelphia Academy, absentee rates during the 2020-21 and 2021-22 school years reflected the trends found in other large American cities with comparable demographics. Philadelphia Academy's absentee rates for 2020-21 and 2021-22 were the

highest they had ever been. It was clear that students were more disengaged and unmotivated than ever before, and simply returning to in-person instruction was not a panacea for improving student motivation. Although research has suggested that use of technology enhances student motivation (Ayari, et. al., 2012; Glover & Miller, 2001; Mistler-Jackson & Songer, 2000), what became apparent during the 2020-21 and 2021-22 school years suggested otherwise.

With student performance and class participation declining in 2020-21, and the same trends echoing into the 2021-22 school year, I became interested in investigating why my students were exhibiting a lack of motivation during and after emergency remote instruction. Through reflection warm-up questions and informal conversations with students, I began to see some patterns in how and why students felt increasingly unmotivated during and after the pandemic. I wondered if and how teacher dispositions and affect impacted students' motivation. I also wondered how students' larger social interactions and contexts impacted their motivation, as well as change and continuity in these factors before and after the period of remote instruction from March 2020 to June 2021.

Statement of Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the factors impacting student motivation during and after remote instruction. The study centers the sociocultural factors that uniquely impact student motivation in the context of the student population my school serves. It seeks to highlight change and continuity in these socioeconomic factors impacting student motivation during and after remote instruction. Finally, the study

compares differences in student motivation among students who commenced their high school careers online versus those who commenced their high school careers in-person.

Research Questions

As this study seeks to identify and compare factors that impacted student motivation during and after the period of remote instruction necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the research questions guiding this study are as follows:

1. What factors impacted students' perceptions of their motivation during emergency remote instruction?
2. What factors impacted students' perceptions of their motivation after returning to in-person instruction?

Research Design

This inquiry was conducted as a qualitative, phenomenological study. A qualitative approach is appropriate when the study is concerned with a particular context (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998), and when the study seeks to identify pragmatic answers to a specific problem of practice in the researcher's own setting (Creamer, 2018). These aspects of qualitative research are congruent with the aim of action research, which is defined as "an inquiry conducted by practitioners in their own educational settings in order to advance their practice and improve their students' learning" (Efron & Ravid, 2013, p. 9). With that, in this study, I investigate trends that were relevant to my students and teaching practice during the unprecedented challenges of the 2020-21 and 2021-22 school years. The challenges my students faced were unique given the culture and demographics of the school, the cultural and demographic context of Philadelphia more

largely, and the fact that the majority of the students never received in-person instruction during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Phenomenological research – or phenomenology – is an approach to qualitative research that has significant overlap with action research. At its core, the aim of phenomenological research is to understand, rather than explain, how individuals perceive and experience a phenomenon (Dukes, 1984). Phenomenological research rejects starting the research process with a hypothesis, seeking instead to elucidate patterns and trends that are shared among a *specific* group of individuals experiencing the same phenomenon (Lester, 1999). With that said, it is crucial to note than phenomenologists are careful about generalizing their findings, as the findings of a phenomenological study are only able to capture the experiences of a certain group of people (Grossoehme, 2014). This is a characteristic shared with action research studies, which "emphasize the usefulness of the inquiry results to one's own practice rather than seeking to generalize the results and make them applicable to different educational settings" (Efron & Ravid, 2013, p. 215). In this study, the phenomenon is experiencing unprecedented disruptions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, and the group consists of students at Philadelphia Academy. While the experience of COVID-related disruptions was a global phenomenon (which has an inherent structure and logic), the lived experience of Philadelphia Academy students was unique and therefore cannot be generalized, just as the lived experiences of other groups of students cannot be generalized.

Grossoehme's (2014) process for phenomenological research was used for this study. This process includes the following steps: (1) after collecting data from interviews

and surveys, thoroughly read through the data multiple times, being mindful not to impose any meaning on it, (2) use a process of inductive coding to begin to find patterns, or "meaning units," (3) sort "meaning units" into larger categories, (4) infer the meaning of participants' words in academic language, and (5) succinctly summarize the major themes present in the data (Grossoehme, 2014, p. 9).

Participants

During the 2020-21 school year, the participants of this study were recruited from my 9th grade World History classes. Participation in the study was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from students and parents/guardians. Students were given the option to complete the questionnaire as an extra credit assignment. Ultimately, 82 students successfully completed the questionnaire. Only students who completed the questionnaire could participate in an interview, which counted in lieu of an exam grade. Students who completed the interview were given full credit for this exam grade. Thirty-two students completed an interview. At the conclusion of data collection, a representative sampling of six students was chosen to be the subjects of a multiple case study. This group included three males, two females, and one non-binary student. Two participants were Hispanic/Latino, two were Black, and two were multiracial. One student was an English language learner (ELL) and one received special education services for a specific learning disability (SLD) as well as an emotional disturbance (ED).

The following school year, I shifted my focus to examining differences in students who had commenced their high school careers in-person versus online. For this reason, during the 2021-22 school year, I recruited student participants in both my ninth grade World History class as well as my eleventh/twelfth grade AP Psychology class.

Instruments for data collection were revised, but still consisted of a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. This year, thirty-two students completed the preliminary questionnaire, and eleven students decided to participate in an interview. I again chose a representative sample of six students. The 2021-22 focal group included two males, three females, and one non-binary student. The racial/ethnic makeup of the focal group included three Hispanic/Latino students, two multiracial students, and one Black student. One student was an English language learner (ELL) and one received special education services for a specific learning disability (SLD). This time, there were also a variety of ages represented in the focus group: there were two ninth graders, two eleventh graders, and two twelfth graders.

To protect the confidentiality of participants, pseudonyms are used in the study. Only students' ages, racial/ethnic identities, and genders are identified (see Tables 3.1 and 3.2). All information was stored on a password-protected computer only accessible to the researcher.

Instruments

For each focal group, two main instruments were used for data collection: an open-ended survey and a semi-structured interview. The format of these instruments remained the same for the 2020-21 and 2021-22 focal groups, with some changes made to the 2021-22 instruments to account for the transition to in-person instruction. (See Table 3.3 for instruments used by research question and focal group.) I refer to the 2020-21 survey as Survey 1 (Appendix B), the 2020-21 interview script as Interview 1 (Appendix C), the 2021-22 survey as Survey 2 (Appendix D), and the 2021-22 interview script at Interview 2 (Appendix E).

Researcher-created surveys are valuable instruments for qualitative research because they are created specifically to answer the research questions. Open-ended surveys provide participants with the opportunity for expression through words (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). These instruments offer a means of collecting information on participants' beliefs, attitudes, and behavior (Boynton & Greenhalgh, 2004). As motivation is closely tied to these three aspects, the survey is an appropriate tool for this study. Furthermore, it is important to note that surveys usually measure participants' perceptions and not what they actually do (Efron & Ravid, 2013). Because the research questions are concerned with students' perceptions of their motivations, surveys are a useful tool for mining this data. Surveys were administered as a Google Form via Google Classroom during both phases of research.

Interviews are useful for understanding participants' cognitive processes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Because motivation is a cognitive phenomenon, this method of data collection was well-suited to the study. As discussed in Chapter 2, sociocultural theory (SCT), self-determination theory (SDT), and social contagion theory each posit that motivation is linked to unseen, cognitive processes. According to SCT, motivation is sustained through meaningful social interactions (Lemke, 2001). SDT maintains that there are three major psychological needs that must be met in order for an individual to be motivated. These needs include autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 1995, 2000a). Finally, social contagion theory contends that behaviors as well as attitudes can be spread in social settings (Levy & Nail, 1993).

Semi-structured interviews were used to gain insight into students' cognitive processes impacting motivation. Semi-structured interviews allow participants to "co-

construct the narrative and raise and pursue issues that are related to the study but were not included when the interview questions were planned" (Efron & Ravid, 2013, p. 98). This particular approach to interviewing was appropriate because it aligns with the conceptual framework of the study. During the 2020-21 school year, I conducted semi-structured interviews with thirty-two students, with each interview ranging in length from twenty-two to thirty-seven minutes. All but one interview was conducted over Zoom, which was audio recorded. There was one interview that was conducted in person, which was audio recorded as well. The audio recordings were transcribed using Sonix, an online transcription service. I reviewed each audio recording and written transcript to ensure accuracy. I conducted semi-structured interviews with eleven students during the 2021-22 school year, all of which were done in-person and audio recorded. These audio recordings were again transcribed using the online transcription service Sonix and checked for accuracy.

Data Collection and Analysis

In any qualitative study, data collection and analysis should occur simultaneously (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For this reason, data from the surveys was used to inform the scripts for the semi-structured interviews. Survey 1 informed the script for Interview 1, and Survey 2 informed the script for Interview 2, as patterns and trends from the survey data helped me to identify aspects of student motivation that needed to be addressed in greater depth. This approach aligns with best practices in qualitative research outlined by Merriam and Tisdell (2016):

> At the outset of a qualitative study, the investigator knows what the problem is and has selected a purposeful sample to collect data in order to address the

> problem. But the researcher does not know what will be discovered, what or whom to concentrate on, or what the final analysis will be like. The final product is shaped by the data that are collected and the analysis that needs to be processed (p. 197).

Throughout data collection and analysis, in keeping with a phenomenological approach, I used a process of inductive coding to construct categories. In inductive coding, the researcher lets the data "speak for itself." In this approach, the researcher determines codes from words or phrases that are used by the participants themselves (Linneburg & Korsgaard, 2019). I used Delve, an encrypted, online subscription service, to organize codes in the survey and interview data.

Also, in accordance with phenomenological research, I use thick description to present data obtained from surveys and interviews. The use of thick description enhances the external validity or transferability of a study, as it provides the reader with the necessary context to "assess the similarity between them and… the study" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, as cited in Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 257).

Chapter Summary

This qualitative, phenomenological study aims to identify sociocultural and academic factors influencing student motivation during and after emergency remote instruction necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Data was gathered from a representative sampling of students through open-ended surveys and semi-structured interviews. Twelve participants were chosen for the study – six from the 2020-21 school year and six from the 2021-22 school year. Data collection and analysis occurred

simultaneously during both phases of research, and a blended approach to coding was used to ensure integration of data and theory.

Table 3.1 Participant Characteristics: 2020-21 Focal Group

Pseudonym	Grade	Age	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	English Language Learner (ELL)/Special Education (SpecEd)
Ada	9	15	Non-binary	Black/Latinx	Not ELL or SpecEd
Angelica	9	15	Female	Latinx	ELL
Darren	9	14	Male	Black	Not ELL or SpecEd
Eddie	9	15	Male	Black	Not ELL or SpecEd
Giovanni	9	15	Male	Latinx	Not ELL or SpecEd
Vanessa	9	16	Female	White/Latinx	SpecEd

Table 3.2 Participant Characteristics: 2021-22 Focal Group

Pseudonym	Grade	Age	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	English Language Learner (ELL)/Special Education (SpecEd)
Ayanna	11	17	Female	Black	Not ELL or SpecEd
Ebony	9	15	Female	Black/Latinx	Not ELL or SpecEd
Javier	12	18	Male	Black/Latinx	Not ELL or SpecEd
Justin	9	15	Male	Latinx	SpecEd
Lucy	11	17	Female	Latinx	ELL
Reese	11	17	Non-binary	Black/Latinx	Not ELL or SpecEd

Table 3.3 Instruments by Research Question

Research Question	Instruments	Participants
1. What factors impacted students' perceptions of their motivation during emergency remote instruction?	Survey 1, Interview 1	2020-21 Focal Group
2. What factors impacted students' perceptions of their motivation after returning to in-person instruction?	Survey 2, Interview 2	2021-22 Focal Group

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

This chapter outlines the findings of the data gathered in this qualitative, narrative inquiry study. This study had two rounds of data collection: one in Spring of 2021, and a second in Spring of 2022. In Spring of 2021, thirty-two ninth grade students in my World History classes took part in semi-structured interviews detailing their experiences with virtual learning and its effects on their motivation during the 2020-21 school year. These interviews were conducted over Zoom, which were then transcribed and coded. Six eleventh grade students and four twelfth grade students in my AP Psychology class and three ninth grade students in my World History class took part in semi-structured interviews in Spring of 2022, which were conducted in-person after school. Interviews were audio recorded using Zoom, and audio files were used for transcription. The interview scripts for 2021 and 2022 were mostly similar, with questions in the latter focusing on the before-and-after impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on student motivation. In both school years, students also completed a written survey to accompany their interviews and were sometimes asked to elaborate on answers via email or other written response.

Of the students who completed an interview, for the purposes of this study, I selected twelve in total – six from Spring 2021 and six from Spring 2022. These twelve students were chosen based on representative sampling, taking into account racial/ethnic identity, gender identity, and special education and English language learner status. In

this chapter, I organize these findings and relate them to the theories discussed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

Focal Student-Participant Biographies: Spring 2021

The following section provides biographies for the six focal student-participants of the 2020-21 focal group. Students in this focal group were all in ninth grade at the time of the study. As such, four of the students had never experienced face-to-face instruction in their high school careers, and two had experienced very limited face-to-face instruction. In February 2021, a small number of students were selected for hybrid instruction due to academic concerns. These students received face-to-face instruction for two days per week for the remainder of the 2020-21 school year.

Ada

Ada is a fifteen-year-old, non-binary ninth grade student who identifies as Afro-Latinx. Ada lives in northeast Philadelphia with their mother, father, four sisters, and a brother. One of the middle children, Ada strives to be a role model to their younger siblings. They are also responsible for helping care for their younger siblings after school. They especially admire their oldest sister because she was one of the first in Ada's family to earn a college degree. According to Ada, this is the person in their life who inspires them most because of their ambitions and the fact that she is an "overall great person." Like their older sister, Ada aspires to attend college to pursue a degree in visual arts, which has been Ada's passion for as long as they can remember, stating that "I remember telling my mom that [I was interested in art] since I was four years old, drawing on the walls and stuff." Ada is particularly interested in anime/manga, comics, and photography, and could often be seen carrying a sketchbook and doodling between classes. In addition

to visual art, Ada is also interested in music and is self-taught on the ukulele. Ada has attended Philadelphia Academy since kindergarten, and has several siblings and cousins who have graduated from or are currently at Philadelphia Academy.

Ada struggled with virtual learning. Up until this point in their academic career, school had come easily for Ada, and they had always earned high grades throughout elementary and middle school. This caused Ada to feel negatively about themself: "Not being able to be in class most of the year, it really put me down because I would literally thrive in school. Like before this, I had honors and stuff, but this year I struggled." Ada's grades decreased significantly during their ninth-grade year, and resultantly, they were one of the students prioritized for in-person instruction in February 2021. In both virtual and in-person instruction, World History was one of the classes that Ada consistently performed well in, likely due to their personal interest in the subject matter.

Angelica

Angelica is a fifteen-year-old female who is in the ninth grade at Philadelphia Academy. She lives in northeast Philadelphia, where she was born and raised, with her mother, older sister, younger sister, and younger brother. Her father passed away three years ago. Angelica's parents immigrated from Mexico before she and her siblings were born. Her parents' experiences with barriers, discrimination, and bigotry due to their undocumented status had a profound impact on Angelica. Seeing their struggles first-hand inspired Angelica to want to pursue a career in immigration law: "I got interested in law because my parents, they came over here as immigrants and like, them not having papers and not being able to leave and see their families for so long inspired me to want to help other people." It is clear that Angelica feels a deep calling to help others that were

in the same situation as her parents. Other interests of hers include world history, mythology, and writing.

Angelica seemed to thrive in the online environment, having earned As and Bs in all of her freshman classes. She had nearly perfect attendance and regularly participated in class, usually by commenting in the Zoom chat. She rarely focused her camera on her face, keeping it pointed up towards the ceiling. She also rarely unmuted her microphone to speak aloud. The first time I heard her voice was during the interview. Despite her good academic performance during her freshman year, Angelica admitted that the 2020-21 school year felt like a blur to her, stating, "The school year went by so fast for me. I don't feel like I'm a freshman. I feel like I'm still in eighth grade."

Darren

Darren, a fourteen-year-old Black male, has attended Philadelphia Academy since kindergarten. An only child raised by a single mother, Darren is extremely close with his mother, who is quite protective of him ("She keeps me kind of sheltered at times," states Darren.). Darren and his mother live in northeast Philadelphia. He is very artistically inclined and hopes to pursue a career in a creative field such as graphic design or voice acting. In his free time, Darren enjoys drawing and playing video games.

Like many of his peers, Darren felt that he struggled with virtual learning. His grades fell and he did not feel any drive to complete assignments. Darren had always prided himself in being a self-disciplined student, and he was frustrated by being unable to explain why his motivation dropped so drastically during the period of virtual learning, stating that "I don't know what started [a drop in motivation], but I think something happened to me which led me to not wanting it. I had no motivation, no drive to do any

of the school stuff. All I did was lay down and sleep, but it's not like I needed it.". Even though he desperately wanted to have the opportunity for in-person instruction during the hybrid period, he was not considered to be academically at-risk, and therefore was not chosen for a hybrid cohort. Despite this disappointment, Darren tried to make the best of the 2020-21 school year by striving to make his experience with virtual learning as "real" as possible by keeping his camera on and frequently unmuting his microphone to contribute verbally during class.

Eddie

Eddie is a fifteen-year-old Black male who is interested in mythology and video games. He resides in northeast Philadelphia with his mother, stepfather, and four siblings. He is a Philadelphia Academy "legacy," with several siblings and cousins having graduated from or currently attending the school. A highly social and empathetic person, Eddie desires a career in the mental/behavioral health field. He has a strong desire to help others overcome their problems, and based on his experiences with his friends, he considers himself to be good at it. Eddie's family is very close-knit, and his parents instilled a sense of resilience in him from a young age. According to Eddie, a characteristic of his family is that "we don't give up.". Eddie and his family take pride in their sense of grit, and the importance of education has always been communicated to Eddie and his siblings. While Eddie appreciates the importance of education, he dislikes school as an institution. He prefers educational methods that allow him choice and freedom. With that, Eddie felt that virtual learning was a good fit for him. He appreciated the flexibility it allowed, and felt that he performed better in the 2020-21 school year than

any other year. Eddie also attributed this improvement to a lack of distractions at home, particularly in regards to socialization interfering with his focus in class.

Giovanni

Giovanni, a fifteen-year-old Hispanic/Latino male, has attended Philadelphia Academy since kindergarten. His aspiration is to attend college on a basketball scholarship, although he is not sure what he would want to major in. Born and raised in northeast Philadelphia, Giovanni lives with his mother, father, and younger brother. Giovanni has a large family, most of whom live locally. He was particularly close with his grandfather, who he considered to be his role model. Throughout his academic career, Giovanni has always been a top-performing student, and was selected for the competitive "star track" placement at Philadelphia Academy (equivalent to honors programs at other schools).

The 2020-21 school year was particularly difficult for Giovanni, not because of anything related to virtual learning itself, but due to health challenges and a death in the family. At the beginning of the 2020-21 school year, Giovanni underwent double arm surgery. He was unable to type or write by hand for several weeks as he recovered, which considerably hindered his academic progress. When he returned to instruction, Giovanni felt overwhelmed by the amount of work he had to make up and was reluctant to ask teachers for any help or extensions on deadlines. Shortly after Giovanni recovered from surgery, he tested positive for COVID-19 and had to be physically isolated from the rest of his family. During his isolation period, his grandfather passed away. Giovanni was devastated over not being able to say goodbye to his grandfather, and felt deep regret in "taking his [grandfather's] time for granted." Giovanni's health challenges and

concurrent bereavement had a profound impact on him. His grades dropped briefly, but Giovanni was able to quickly get back on track.

Vanessa

Vanessa is a sixteen-year-old female student who is classified with a specific learning disability (SLD) in math, for which she has an individualized education plan (IEP). Vanessa identifies as multiracial – white on her mother's side of the family, and Hispanic/Latino on her father's side. Her father was incarcerated for several years while she was in elementary and middle school. As such, her father was absent for much of her childhood. Since Vanessa's father has been released from prison, he has worked to rebuild his relationship with Vanessa and her siblings, including helping to teach them Spanish, which Vanessa was never able to learn from her father as a child. Vanessa lives in northeast Philadelphia with her mother, father, and five siblings. As the second-oldest sibling, Vanessa has many responsibilities helping to take care of her three younger siblings, who are nine, seven, three, and one. Vanessa describes her family is "chaotic but loving."

Vanessa had been enrolled in the School District of Philadelphia (SDP) until November of her eighth-grade year. She started attending Philadelphia Academy after she was expelled from SDP after being involved in a physical altercation with another student. Both before and after this incident, Vanessa was involved in a great deal of "drama" with her peers, both at SDP and Philadelphia Academy. According to Vanessa, this was because she was "trying to be someone [she's] not." Before the altercation with another student, Vanessa says she was highly social and outgoing. However, she is now withdrawn, taciturn, and very anxious. Something that has stuck with her, however, is her

love of reading and writing. She always had a romance novel in hand, stating that she "loves love."

From the beginning of the pandemic, Vanessa struggled with virtual learning. For the first two marking periods of the 2020-21 school year, Vanessa frequently missed virtual instruction and completed very few assignments. Vanessa said she was frustrated with online learning: "My grades went down because I understood none of it. You know, you're not with a teacher to fully explain it." As she was in danger of retention, and because of her special education status, Vanessa was prioritized for in-person learning during the hybrid period. After her return to in-person instruction, Vanessa's grades – and confidence – improved considerably. Says Vanessa of this experience, "When my uncle told me they were bringing kids back in [to school], I was excited because I was like, I'll go back in and get my grades up, which I did, and I'm thankful for that."

Recurring Themes: Spring 2021

Throughout the transcription and coding process, several similarities and themes became apparent among these six students' experiences with virtual learning. Using a process of inductive coding, I identified five major themes that I found to be significant in terms of student motivation during the mostly virtual 2020-21 school year. These themes are: (1) motivation as externally derived, (2) flexibility, (3) use of technology, (4) adjusting to a new reality, and (5) teacher affect and disposition. I will present students' own words from their interviews and the survey. I will also add my own supporting comments where applicable and appropriate. These themes are grounded in two major theories: self-determination theory (SDT) and socio-cultural theory (SCT). A third

theory, social contagion theory, can be considered a sub-theory of both SDT and SCT, a "bridge" of sorts between them.

SDT is based primarily on the work of Edward Deci and Richard Ryan (2000a), who posited that "an understanding of human motivation requires a consideration of innate psychological needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness" (p. 227). Competence refers to one's sense of being able to effectively perform a task, autonomy refers to "the experience of behavior as volitional and self-endorsed" (Niemec & Ryan, 2009, p. 134). These two needs are especially crucial to sustaining intrinsic motivation, which refers to doing something because of its inherent enjoyability or interest (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). The third major psychological need, relatedness, refers to a sense of belonging (Ryan, et. al., 1995). The psychological need of relatedness is most strongly associated with extrinsic motivation, or behaviors that are externally prompted (Ryan & Deci, 2000a).

SCT is most closely associated with the work of Lev Vygotsky, who proposed that there exists an interdependence between social interaction and individual cognition in learning. As social creatures, humans interact with cultural tools, which are both real and symbolic. Through using these tools, humans arrive at a mediated understanding of the world around them (Lantolf, 2000). Cultural tools are continuously modified as they are passed on from one generation to the next as individuals adapt to change (Lantolf, 2000).

Social contagion theory can be understood as a sub-theory of both SDT and SCT, tying these two theories together. Social contagion theory seeks to explain individual behavior in the context of groups. According to social contagion theory, behavior and

attitudes can spread through groups "in much the same way as diseases spreading during epidemics" (Gladwell, 2000, p. 245).

Motivation as Externally Derived

An interesting trend that I noticed across the student interviews is that the majority of students conceptualized motivation as something that is imparted from the outside-in. When asked how they define motivation, four of six students' perceptions reflected this trend. Students explained that they need someone else – usually a parent or authority figure – to help spark their motivation. This trend is connected with both SCT and SDT, which will be explained at the end of this section. Social contagion theory might also explain this phenomenon.

Eddie conceptualized motivation as a sense of persistence that is imparted from the outside in. Eddie felt that, in order to be motivated, he needed another person to encourage and push him, as feeling motivated is not something he is able to do internally, at least not initially. When asked what it means to him to be motivated, Eddie responded, "It's when someone pushes you to keep going and prosper and finish whatever you're doing." For Eddie, the people who "push" him are his parents and teachers that he has built a rapport with, regardless of his feelings toward or interest in the subject matter. Eddie's response underscores the importance of relatedness in student motivation. Adults who express warmth, caring, and respect to students support their need for relatedness (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009), which is associated most strongly with extrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000a).

Like Eddie, Angelica stressed the importance of encouragement from others in sustaining her motivation, particularly from friends and family. When asked about her

conceptualization of motivation, Angelica said "My best friend and my mom motivate me a lot with school. Positivity is important to me. They say positive things about me and that keeps me going." Angelica also discussed how her motivation in school impacts other areas of her life. When she feels motivated academically, bolstered by affirmations from family and friends, Angelica feels that "helps in [her] personal life too." Receiving positive affirmations from secure relationships is another way in which students' needs for relatedness are supported. According to Ryan and Deci (2002), feeling secure in connections with others is crucial to one's need for relatedness. These positive affirmations helped Angelica to feel that these connections are secure.

Angelica further stated that a crucial part of staying motivated is balancing rest and work. However, during periods of rest, Angelica does not feel motivated, and will need another person to help her get back to a motivated state, just as Eddie said he needs a "push" from others to be motivated. Says Angelica of this, "Sometimes when I rest, I just want to continue doing what I'm doing. But if, like, my friend or my mom says something to me, like 'hey, you need to do this,' that'll get me more motivated." During periods that she does feel motivated, Angelica said, "I don't have to take as much time for myself," being able to completely focus on the task at hand. For Angelica, it seems that rest and work are opposing forces rather than cyclical and symbiotic.

Like Eddie and Angelica, Giovanni also talked about the impact of others on sustaining his motivation. Unlike Eddie and Angelica, however, Giovanni does not necessarily rely on encouragement from people he has personal relationships with in order to stay motivated. Instead, Giovanni derives motivation from the stories of others who have overcome challenges, through what sociologists refer to as parasocial

relationships (Giles, 2002). According to Social Contagion Theory, in order for behavioral contagion to occur – in Giovanni's case, the behavior being a sense of drive through challenging times – the follower (Giovanni) must realize that imitating the initiator's (historical figures) behavior has a benefit, and that the initiator is a positive reference model (Wheeler, 1966). For Giovanni, historical figures who have overcome challenges fit both of these requirements.

Although he says he knows they mean well, Giovanni said that he does not get a sense of encouragement from his parents, but pressure. He does see his parents' life stories as inspiring, as both of his parents had to overcome financial hardships and discrimination due to their ethnicity and immigration status. However, Giovanni stated that his interactions with his parents on the topic of school were somewhat stressful and demotivating:

> My family has very high expectations, like they expect me to have nothing lower than a C. Because the generation before me, like my mother, uncles, even my cousins, everybody got good grades. [My parents] expect the same to come out of me and my siblings.

When asked how that makes him feel, Giovanni replied,

> It's been like that since I was little. So I'm like – I'm used to it, almost numb to it, but it wasn't always like that. Now I know I will always come home with pretty good grades. I'm pretty on top of school.

While Giovanni now understands that his parents' pressure on him is a flawed execution of good intent, he still does not derive any motivation from these interactions, instead he almost tunes them out, saying, "At an earlier age, [my parents' pressure] used to get me

demotivated, but now I've gotten used to it. I know they just want me to do good." However, Giovanni still has a need to derive motivation from external sources, which in his case is stories of inspiring individuals in history. When asked what he likes to learn about, Giovanni stated that he enjoys studying "something somebody has gone through and how they overcame it, [and] what their motivation was to keep going." This may be considered an example of a parasocial relationship, as Giovanni does not interact with these inspiring historical figures in real life, but only psychologically (Giles, 2002). Parasocial relationships may also be a source of contagion, as contagion occurs when an individual sees another as a positive role model whose behavior should be emulated, and in Giovanni's case, the individuals with whom he perceives a parasocial relationship with fit these criteria (Wheeler, 1966).

Giovanni's explanation of the impact his parents' pressure has on his motivation reflects the findings of Levesque, et. al. (2004). According to this study, when students feel too much pressure to complete tasks, their needs of autonomy and competence are thwarted. This pressure may be external – "I'll get in trouble if I don't complete a task" – or internal – feelings of guilt, anxiety, or self-approval (Levesque, et. al., 2004). Giovanni describes an example of external pressure, in this case from his parents. According to Levesque, et. al. (2004), external pressure "represents the form of motivation with the lowest level of autonomy" (p. 72).

The findings of the Spring 2021 interviews suggest that students feel most motivated when there is a "just right" number and intensity of external factors influencing them. Students are most motivated when they feel *inspired* rather than when they feel *pressured*.

Flexibility

For many students, a greater sense of flexibility – in terms of their daily schedules, teacher policies, and negotiable deadlines – was a factor that increased their reported motivation during the virtual learning period. Every student who brought up flexibility in their interview mentioned how more fluid guidelines and expectations had the impact of increasing their senses of control and effectiveness, or as they are referred to in SDT, autonomy and competence, respectively. Both autonomy and competence are paramount to sustaining intrinsic motivation (Gagné & Deci, 2005).

For Eddie, the flexibility afforded by virtual learning allowed him to have a greater sense of autonomy and competence in his schoolwork. Eddie said that having a later start time was beneficial for his mental health, saying, "…school is really early, and it's so mind-boggling to be, you know, racing so early in the morning. It just throws you off." When asked to expand on that, Eddie stated:

> [The later start time] gives me enough time to get up and get focused, you know, do everything without having to rush. Trying to get up at seven, be super-duper tired, and got to do this, got to do that, and just be all disoriented. [The later start time] gives me a window to focus.

Eddie also appreciated the fact that he was able to get tasks done at his own pace and set his own schedule during the day. Studies have shown that rigid deadlines have the effect of lowering students' sense of autonomy, which Eddie's responses reflect (Reeve, Bolt, & Cai, 1999; Reeve & Jang, 2006).

Like Eddie, Ada reported that flexibility was also an important factor impacting their motivation. Ada stated they feel most motivated when teachers are understanding

and allow students flexibility when needed: “The teacher I learn best from is a teacher who knows that everyone has their struggles, and that it’s okay to struggle, and they’ll completely understand.”

Use of Technology

While numerous studies have suggested that use of technology in education is associated with increased student motivation (Ayari, et. al., 2012; Glover & Miller, 200l; Mistler-Jackson & Songer, 2000), the findings of the Spring 2021 interviews suggested that this is not always true, and that social interaction and context are important to consider along with use of technology. For many students, their frustrations with technology led to decreased senses of autonomy and competence. Several students reported feeling frustrated with the ubiquity of technology and the desire to reject the use of technology whenever possible.

Vanessa and Ada spoke about how they both felt they could not improve in certain subjects, maintaining that they have never been and never will be “good” at them, reflecting a perceived lack of competence. For Vanessa, this subject was math, which she stated was “not [her] strong suit.” (It is worth noting here that Vanessa receives special education services for a specific learning disability in mathematics.) I asked Vanessa whether she felt that was due to the subject material itself or the way it was taught. Vanessa replied, “I feel like it’s just math in general. I’m not good with the numbers and it takes so many steps to get it all done.” They saw math as being in direct contrast with a subject they felt naturally competent with – reading, stating, “Math versus reading, [math is like] ‘do this, do that.’ Reading, on the other hand, I love it. You can let your imagination fly free with it. And I am a fast reader.” Ada reported a perceived lack

of competence in writing, stating, “I’m not really that good at writing. If you were to give me, like, a small prompt to do, I might be somewhat good at it. But if you were to give me something to do, like a poem or a haiku, I wouldn’t be able to do it very well.” I then asked Ada if the assertion they are “not good” at writing is something that others have told them or if that is what they have told themself. Ada stated simply, “That is what I have told myself.”

Vanessa and Ada both felt that virtual learning exacerbated their negative feelings towards the areas they had a perceived lack of competence in. Both felt frustrated by having to work on computers, preferring to complete their work by hand. Vanessa and Ada also seemed to lack a sense of competence in terms of their ability to adapt to and use technology. According to Ada, they were “never good at the online stuff.” When asked to expand on that, Ada stated, “Last school year we started doing more stuff online and I wasn’t used to it. And I kind of fell back a little because of how much I disliked working with the laptops. Doing activities on paper helped me focus more.” Ada said they were able to adapt somewhat to using computers for written assignments. Vanessa similarly expressed a preference for completing assignments by hand and a dislike of using the computers: “I would rather do [math] on paper instead of on the computer because I can actually see what I’m doing, or I can draw or things like that.” Vanessa eventually became resigned to the idea that she could “never” do her work on the computer. It is evident from their interviews that both Vanessa and Ada both perceived this new use of technology as an insurmountable task. When individuals perceive that a task is too difficult, their sense of competence is strongly diminished (Moss, 2018), and resultantly lose intrinsic motivation (Gagné & Deci, 2009).

Using technology proved to be an obstacle in terms of communicating with teachers, which in turn, impacted some students' sense of relatedness. Ada experienced a great deal of anxiety when having to communicate with teachers via email. "That's the problem for me, I get so stressed out about sending emails for some reason," Ada said, "I don't know why, but in the end I just can't [send emails]. It makes me feel stressed." Looking to SCT, Ada's negative feelings towards communicating with teachers online might be explained by a lack of scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978); students were never given step-by-step instruction in how to communicate with more knowledgeable others in this new, unfamiliar setting.

Adjusting to a New Reality

In each interview, each student acknowledged how the demands of virtual learning were markedly different from that of their previous in-school experience, particularly in terms of how much unstructured and/or unsupervised time they had during the school day. This adjustment to a new reality had a profound impact on their motivation. For most students, this was associated with a decline in both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. This might be explained by the lack of a knowledgeable other in their day-to-day schooling, which according to SCT, is necessary for a student to interact with in a social setting in order to effectively learn (Vygotsky, 1978).

With the school day shortened by two hours, lack of school-imposed restrictions on internet and social media access, and often little or no adult supervision or assistance, students needed considerable self-discipline to stay on track, which they had not needed previously due to the structured nature of the school schedule and environment. Many of them admitted that they were unprepared for such a change, and they were often

navigating distractions they never had to deal with before. For many students, this sudden change was accompanied by a myriad of negative emotions. Through the lens of SCT, this can be understood as students not having a more knowledgeable other to help guide them through their zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978), which in this case was their ability to self-regulate in an unstructured setting.

Darren stated that the change to virtual learning felt jarring and left him feeling uncharacteristically lethargic, resulting in him experiencing internal distractions:

> I don't know what started it, but I think something happened to me which led me to not wanting [to do schoolwork]. I had no motivation, no drive to do anything, any of the school stuff. All I did was mainly just lay down and sleep. And it wasn't sleep like I needed it. I just kind of did because, I don't know, I had no motivation to do anything.

This suggests that, like many during the COVID-19 pandemic, Darren appeared to become apathetic, and perhaps even depressed, in the wake of social isolation. In the interview, Darren seemed flustered that he could not point to a "why" or a singular moment that precipitated a shift in his focus and motivation. Darren stated he had never experienced something like that before, and he thinks that "giving up on stuff is very weird" for him.

For Angelica, distractions and distress came in the form of anxiety related to the pandemic itself. When asked what was challenging for her during virtual learning, Angelica stated her greatest stressors were initially not school-related, but rather "things going on with the virus, and then when it got really bad, it was stressing because we couldn't go out, and I felt like staying at home made everything a little bit bad."

Angelica grew weary of the repetitive nature of life in isolation, especially since she did not have many friends that she kept in contact with outside of school. Now that she had a great deal of unstructured time she was not accustomed to, she did not know how to fill that time. As a result, Angelica began to feel increasingly agitated, stating, "I feel like now I have been more moody [*sic*] and my attitude isn't the same as before."

Eddie seemed to have more positive feelings about the newfound freedom that came with virtual learning, stating that he liked the freedom and slower pace that the new schedule afforded him. However, Eddie still recognized negative aspects of having so much unstructured time. When asked about his present attitude towards school during the 2020-21 school year, Eddie said,

> I feel like, in [virtual] school, I can focus better on the computer, but when you're in school [in person], you've got to really – you've got to *be* there. You got to do what you got to do. But when you're online it gives you a little bit too much freedom. And I got a little relaxed.

Eddie stated that this more relaxed attitude is what contributed to his grades not being as high as they were pre-pandemic. During the 2020-21 school year, Eddie was more likely than in previous years to get distracted by socializing, video games, or simply to "zone out," as he reported in the survey. For this, Eddie seemed disappointed in himself, since his family had instilled in him the value of having a good work ethic, saying, "we really don't like to quit." Like Darren, Eddie expressed negative feelings towards himself, holding himself to his pre-pandemic patterns.

Ada agreed that while being at home was enjoyable at times, this enjoyment also came at the expense of their focus on school and subsequent declining grades, which they

found frustrating and demoralizing. Living in a small rowhome in northeast Philadelphia with six other people, Ada found it difficult to concentrate, much less find a sufficiently quiet place to get schoolwork done. Ada also missed the physical environment of school during virtual instruction, saying this was a contributing factor for why they "would literally thrive in school" before the COVID-19 pandemic. When asked what they liked about in-person instruction, Ada said," I think I like the atmosphere and the kids and like the spirit of the classroom and just, like, being around the people I like the most, my friends. And it just makes me want to be less distracted."

For Darren, Eddie, and Ada, the absence of a physical social setting during the 2020-21 school year had adverse effects on their motivation. Without an established social setting, students were not able to integrate socially and culturally constructed forms of mediation. According to activity theory, a sub-theory of SCT, without being able to learn in social settings, individuals' needs cannot become motives, since there is no more knowledgeable other to help students learn to direct their goals (Lantolf, 2000). This phenomenon is evident in the experiences of Darren, Eddie, and Ada in that they discussed how a lack of structure – especially the lack of the structure imposed by classroom teachers – was connected to them feeling less motivated.

Teacher Affect and Disposition

For every student, one of the most significant factors impacting their motivation during virtual learning is their relationships with teachers, or their perceptions of teachers' affect and disposition. As numerous studies have shown (Roorda, et. al., 2011; Lam, et. al., 2009; Midgley, et. al., 1989) students tend to feel more motivated in classes taught by teachers they had positive relationships with, which was evident in this study as

well. This trend is evident regardless of the student's feelings towards the subject matter itself.

Eddie and Giovanni both brought up how they actually felt most motivated in subjects they previously disliked due to how they perceived the teacher's disposition. Having previously disliked social studies, Giovanni reported that social studies – the class I taught – became his favorite subject because he felt my energy was infectious:

> I'm not saying this because you're taking my record, but [I am most motivated in] your [World History] class. I feel really motivated in it and it's because you always have all this energy. And that's what I think attracts students to want to learn… Having energy, it not only makes the students want to learn, but it makes the environment good and it's easier to learn that way.

I then asked Giovanni if he thought his attitude towards the subject changed as a result of how I was able to catch his interest. Giovanni stated that having an energetic teacher fostered his focus in class:

> This year, I'm really interested in [social studies], and I'm like – I'm understanding the topics and all that. Like if someone came up to me or just ask me what we're learning, I could actually have a conversation with them and I could tell them what I'm learning.

Angelica agreed with Giovanni that it was important for teachers to appear energetic and engaged during virtual learning. Angelica stated that she felt more motivated in classes that were taught by teachers with these traits. For Angelica, the class she felt most motivated in was my World History class, stating, "You're so energetic and you always seem excited to have class with us… I don't recall you ever having a bad day."

In contrast, the class Angelica felt least motivated in was taught by a teacher who did not appear energetic or excited in class. In one case, Angelica felt the teacher took out their frustration on her class, which left her feeling even more unmotivated than before:

> I feel like it can be [students'] fault that a teacher is in a bad mood because in class some students won't participate as much. And I feel like that's going to frustrate a teacher more because they're putting their work out there and students aren't taking it seriously. So for example, there was a time in a class that no one was participating. And I would say I was part of it too because I wasn't understanding the class. And then the teacher just ended the [Zoom] meeting.

I asked Angelica how the abrupt ending of the Zoom meeting made her feel, to which she replied, "It got me a little mad, but then I tried to understand that my teacher was tired of students not participating. I understand, but at the same time, it was like, he didn't have to end the meeting. We could have done class and he could have explained more." Angelica explained that she thought this occurrence would exacerbate the issue of students "protesting" by not participating.

The incident described by Angelica highlights a trend that researchers have found in autonomy-supportive teaching versus autonomy-unsupportive teaching. According to Reeve (2002), controlling teaching strategies – such as using threats, sarcasm, and punishments – have the effect of thwarting students' need for autonomy. This is what seemed to happen when Angelica's teacher became frustrated and ended the Zoom meeting; students' need for autonomy was diminished, and students sought to reclaim their sense of autonomy by refusing to participate in class – a silent "protest" of their own.

Relating these findings to social contagion theory, Giovanni, Angelica, and Vanessa seemed to experience a contagion effect in my class, absorbing the energetic affect they perceived. This is similar to the teacher-to-student behavioral contagion discussed by Frenzel, et. al. (2009), which found that teacher enjoyment influences student enjoyment over time. Teachers who seem to enjoy their classes have a positive effect on the motivation of their students as students experience a contagion effect (Frenzel, et. al., 2009).

As discussed in the Use of Technology section, many students discussed how the virtual learning environment made it more difficult to build relationships, especially with teachers. The more positive relationships a student had with individuals in the school environment, the more motivated the student felt. This trend is strongly associated with the concept of relatedness, which is "the need to feel belonginess and connectedness with others" (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 73).

Conclusions: Spring 2021

Based upon the data collected, the most crucial factors impacting student motivation during virtual learning were: (1) motivation as externally derived, (2) flexibility, (3) use of technology, (4) adjusting to a new reality, and (5) teacher affect and disposition. It seemed that during this time, students' needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness were not being met. In particular, the needs for relatedness and competence apparently suffered the most. Students would have benefitted from a sense of relatedness fostered by an invested, more knowledgeable other, but students did not perceive teachers as such. Students were also frustrated by the sudden need to use new sets of tools that they did not feel comfortable using, thwarting their sense of competence.

Social contagion also seemed to play a considerable part in student motivation during virtual learning, which had a considerable impact on students' sense of autonomy, which was sometimes autonomy-supportive, and sometimes not autonomy-supportive.

Focal Student Biographies: Spring 2022

After examining the data for the 2020-21 focal group, I became interested in differences in motivation between students who were socialized differently as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. I wanted to see if and how these factors differed between students who had commenced their high school careers during or after emergency remote instruction, and those who had commenced them before these disruptions. For this reason, I selected both lowerclassmen and upperclassmen students to participate in the 2021-22 focal group. For this phase of research, I selected two freshman students, three juniors, and one senior.

Ayanna

Ayanna is a female, seventeen-year-old junior in my AP Psychology class. I had previously taught Ayanna in my Honors World History class during the 2019-20 school year. Ayanna describes herself as "not very social" and "awkward," preferring to stay "kind of just in the back of the classroom." She is interested in pursuing a career in art or graphic design and is a fan of anime and manga. Ayanna has attended Philadelphia Academy since kindergarten and identifies as Black. She lives in the Kensington neighborhood of Philadelphia with her mom, grandmother, two brothers, and sister. She had previously lived with her father, but after a falling out with him during the pandemic, she was forced to move out: "He was the bad person who kicked me out, so I had to stay

with my aunt for a while." Because of that incident, Ayanna sadly now lives in fear that her family will abandon her:

> I don't know if I'm being overly sensitive, but there are times when my family will like, be rude to me or something and I'll be like, oh, maybe they're going to kick me out again. I'm trying to get comfortable and it's difficult, but it's better I think.

Ebony

Ebony is a fifteen-year-old female student in ninth grade who was in my Honors World History Class. Ebony is a newcomer to Philadelphia Academy; she had previously attended a different charter school in Philadelphia for middle school. Ebony identifies as Afro-Latina and has aspirations to attend a four-year college after high school. A high-achieving student, Ebony earned honor roll every quarter of the 2021-22 school year and took five Honors classes. She also received the Social Studies Award for freshmen.

Ebony has succeeded academically in spite of a chaotic home life. Her family had to move during the COVID pandemic. "We went from four to seven [people] overnight," she stated. She is currently living with her mother, stepfather, grandmother, and three siblings. Her mother and stepfather married and had a new baby recently, adding to a "hectic" atmosphere, as Ebony describes it. When asked about her interaction with her family members, Ebony said, "honestly, lately I've been trying to distance myself from them. I just live with them."

Javier

Javier is an eighteen-year-old male who was in my AP Psychology class during the 2021-22 school year, his senior year. This was the first year I had him in my class.

Javier lives with his mother in the Juniata Park section of Philadelphia. His father has been out of the picture for many years, and Javier does not have much of a relationship with him. However, Javier is very close with his mother, even though he considers her to be quite strict. “She’s very easy to talk to,” Javier said, “unless you cross the line.” Javier identifies as Afro-Latino.

As he looked towards graduating from high school, Javier admitted that he “has no goals” and is unsure what he wants to do with his life. He describes himself as “lazy” and a procrastinator. Although he does not have much direction for what he wants to do after high school, Javier said that he was looking forward to leaving Philadelphia Academy because he felt judged about his past behavior.

Justin

Justin is a fifteen-year-old male student in ninth grade. He was in my inaugural Sociology class during the 2021-22 school year. Justin is an English language learner and receives special education services for a specific learning disability in mathematics. Another newcomer to Philadelphia Academy, Justin transferred schools mid-year in January 2022. Justin is very proud of his Mexican heritage and loves sharing his knowledge of his culture, which he frequently did in Sociology. He is not sure yet what he wants to do after high school.

Justin lives in the Juniata Park section of Philadelphia with his mother, who in his words, is “working a lot and does a lot of things with friends and isn’t around much.” Justin spends much of his time that is not spent at school either by himself at home or with neighbors. He stated that he does not discuss school much with his mother. Their

discussions about school only occur when they are discussing an upcoming parent-teacher conference or IEP meeting.

Lucy

Lucy is a female, seventeen-year-old junior who was in my AP Psychology class during the 2021-22 school year. I had taught Lucy previously during the 2019-20 school year in my Honors World History class, so I knew her quite well by the time I had her again in eleventh grade. Among her teachers and peers, Lucy has a reputation as a conscientious and responsible student, having earned honor roll every marking period since the start of her freshman year. During the 2021-22 school year, Lucy took two other AP classes in addition to Psychology, earning As and Bs in each of them. After high school, Lucy has aspirations to become a lawyer.

Originally from the Dominican Republic, Lucy has lived in Northeast Philadelphia since she was six years old. She has attended Philadelphia Academy since kindergarten. Lucy's living situation is complicated. Due to immigration issues, her parents are unable to live separately since getting divorced. Both of her parents have new partners who also live with the family. One of Lucy's grandmothers lives with them as well. Despite the complexity of this living situation, Lucy says that everyone in the household coexists fairly harmoniously. Lucy is the oldest of six children, the youngest of whom is two years old. As one might imagine, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Lucy had a great deal of responsibilities in caring for her younger siblings.

Reese

Reese, a seventeen-year-old non-binary student, was another one of my AP Psychology students during the 2021-22 school year that I had also previously taught as a

freshman. (Reese and Lucy were classmates in the same World History section during the 2019-20 school year.) Reese lives in the Kensington section of Philadelphia with their parents and younger brother and identifies as Afro-Latinx. They have attended Philadelphia Academy since kindergarten and have several family members who have either graduated from or are currently enrolled at the school. In the future, they are interested in pursuing a career in forensic psychology.

Reese does not feel supported by their family and says that they have been "on [their] own" from a young age. They stated that their parents are not involved in their schooling and rarely ask them about their academics. Reese noted that their parents live paycheck to paycheck, which puts a great deal of stress on the family.

Recurring Themes: Spring 2022

Like I did in the spring of 2021, I conducted semi-structured interviews with students in the spring of 2022. Of the twelve total interviews completed, I chose six for the purpose of this portion of the study. For this round of interviews, which were conducted in-person rather than via Zoom, I was interested in getting the perspective of students who had commenced their high school careers in person rather than online. For this reason, I primarily selected juniors and seniors for interviews (four students in total). I also interviewed two freshmen in order to compare how in-person versus online socialization at the beginning of high school seemed to affect student motivation, and to compare these students' responses with that of the freshmen I interviewed in Spring 2021.

I again used a process of inductive coding to analyze interview data from Spring 2022. The following themes were the most significant in regards to student motivation

post-pandemic: (1) negative feelings towards technology, (2) inconsistency and favoritism, (3) complacency and/or gratitude, and (4) teacher empathy and emotional investment.

Negative Feelings Towards Technology

Despite studies suggesting that use of technology is associated with increased student motivation (Harris, et. al., 2016; Raposo, et. al., 2020), students seemed to harbor negative feelings towards technology during the 2021-22 school year. This underscores a sense of technology fatigue students experienced over the duration of virtual learning. Freshmen Justin and Ebony described virtual learning as impersonal, disengaging, and "robotic." Ebony said she initially liked virtual learning, but quickly became disenchanted with it:

> At first, at the end of seventh grade, [virtual learning] was cool because it was something different and seemed like a break. Then after a few weeks, I feel like we all fell into a depression. Like to have to stare at a talking head on a screen, it was like talking to a robot.

Justin agreed with Ebony that virtual learning was somewhat enjoyable at first, but quickly became something he dreaded participating in: "[Virtual learning] was okay at first. It was chill. But soon I felt like I was talking to a machine, not a teacher. There was [*sic*] no relationships, so I never said much. I just got through it."

This trend was not evident only among underclassmen; juniors and seniors had similar feelings regarding virtual learning, technology, and relationships. Ayanna, a junior, talked about how technological difficulties were a barrier to building rapport with teachers:

> At first I thought virtual learning would be easier. But it was hard to communicate with the teachers. It really was. And sometimes the Wi-Fi would cut out, or the teacher's video or sound would be lagging, and it was annoying. And I didn't really engage in class because it just felt like I was staring at the screen for hours straight and I felt like I wasn't learning. I was unmotivated.

Javier, a senior, also talked about how the virtual format was an impediment to building relationships:

> I am a very, very social person. I talk a lot. I like talking to people. I didn't have this stutter before online learning. I didn't speak to much [*sic*] people during that time. It was hard to focus. Talking to people on the Chromebooks didn't feel normal. It was weird. It made me nervous.

As a result, Javier reported that he "never" asked for help during the virtual period due to his newly developed social anxiety.

Much like the students interviewed in Spring 2021, Ebony's, Justin's, Ayanna's, and Javier's comments underscore the fact that a major psychological need of theirs – relatedness – was not being met through virtual learning. Deci and Ryan (2000) define relatedness as "the desire to feel connected to others – to love and care, and to be loved and cared for" (p. 231). All of these students experienced a decline in their motivation because they did not feel a sense of belonging in the virtual classroom. According to SDT, the need for relatedness is a key factor in an individual understanding the value of a behavior (Gagné & Deci, 2005). For these students, they did not see the value in participating in virtual learning because they did not have a sense of belonging or connectedness.

These four students' experiences can also be understood through the lens of SCT. As mentioned previously, during the 2020-21 school year, students had to adjust to using tools (in particular, Chromebooks and various educational technology platforms) in ways they had not used them before. During the 2021-22 school year, students had to adjust again, this time integrating their experiences with these tools in a new environment. Students had never before utilized one-to-one technology on a daily basis in the classroom. With that said, students were not given the opportunity, either during the 2020-21 school year or 2021-22 school year, to learn to best use these tools through scaffolding. Bruner (1983) defined scaffolding as:

> …a process of setting up the situation to make the child's entry easy and successful and then gradually pulling back and handing the role to the child as he becomes skilled enough to manage it (p. 60).

When students are not given the proper guidance through scaffolding techniques, they are not able to move through the zone of proximal development (Amerian & Mehri, 2014). A study by Rienties, et. al. (2012) on scaffolding in virtual learning discussed how, when done properly, scaffolding fosters students' need for autonomy. With that, we can deduce that Ebony, Justin, Ayanna, and Javier experienced a lack of autonomy in the classroom during and after virtual learning due to a lack of scaffolding on how to best use these new tools.

Inconsistency and Favoritism

Many students, especially the eleventh and twelfth graders, felt that there was little consistency in regards to classroom management, deadlines, and school policies during the 2021-22 school year than in previous years. This had the impact of weakening

students' motivation to follow school policies and behave in accordance with school rules. Lucy, who has attended Philadelphia Academy since kindergarten, said,

> There should be more strict discipline because [the school] is being too lenient. That's not fair because we would get in trouble for lesser things our freshman year. So how are the underclassmen now not getting in trouble for it? That's not fair.

When asked how this impacts her motivation to follow school policies, Lucy said that it personally does not affect her much since she is a self-described rule follower ("I do what I have to do because that's the way it is," Lucy said), but she can understand how it would make others less inclined to do so. "I worry about what things are going to look like in a few years," she said. Reese agreed and stated, "The underclassmen have the mindset that, 'these teachers are not my parents, they can't tell me what to do.' But it's like, the more you get older, the more you realize this stuff is preparing you for the real world."

Lucy also described a contagion effect in terms of students being less inclined to follow school rules. She said, "when some students are not following the rules, and not getting in trouble, more and more kids aren't going to follow the rules because they think it doesn't matter." According to Wheeler (1966), for contagion to occur, the follower realizes that imitating the initiator's behavior has a benefit, and that the initiator is a positive reference model. In this case, some students – particularly students who commenced their high school careers online rather than in-person – perceive a lack of personal consequences as a positive. However, students who commenced their high school careers in-person seem to value structure and clear consequences more. Feeling as

if they did not need to follow school rules may have increased autonomy, but thwarted relatedness.

Reese, who, Like Lucy, has attended Philadelphia Academy since kindergarten, thought that expectations were not communicated to the underclassmen in the same way they were once communicated to the juniors and seniors:

> I don't think [the school's] expectations were clearly communicated with the underclassmen because it was like [the school] didn't really say what they wanted. They just expected you to know. And if you didn't know, they'd penalize you for it. [The underclassmen] are coming off middle school so they don't know how it is up here [in the high school].

Between Lucy's and Reese's statements, it is apparent that there is a difference in motivation to follow school procedures between the juniors and seniors – who had commenced their high school careers in-person – and the freshmen and sophomores – who had commenced their high school careers online.

Looking to SCT, this difference may be explained by the tools used to socialize students. Tools are both physical – such as the computer students used for virtual learning – and symbolic – such as the language used to communicate on virtual platforms (Shabani, 2016). For students like Lucy and Reese, who completed most of their freshman year in person, these cultural tools rarely included computers until the COVID-19 pandemic caused school closures in March 2020. For students who began high school in 2020 or after, like Justin and Ebony, computers were the predominant tool used to transmit information from the schooling institution to students. Considering the fact that Justin and Ebony likened teachers to "robots" or "machines" during the virtual period, it

is evident that students did not perceive teachers as human more knowledgeable others transmitting information, but rather as part of a tool that they did not know how to use.

According to SCT, knowledge is constructed when the learner uses a tool to mediate learning under the guidance of a more knowledgeable other. Abtahi (2017) argues that tools themselves may be more knowledgeable others, but tools are "socially designed, created, and developed within a particular historical context and over time" (p. 36). This means that more knowledgeable others must be somehow involved in helping learners understand how to use tools. Connecting this with SDT, learners will only use tools when they are willing to invest effort in a task (Clarebout & Elen, 2009). As stated previously, in order for a person to feel willing to invest time in a task, the psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness must be met. The lack of the perception of a human more knowledgeable other had an adverse effect on Justin's and Ebony's needs for competence – the feeling that they could successfully complete a task – and relatedness – a feeling of "belongingness" (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 73).

In the same vein as inconsistency, some students felt that a new issue impacting their motivation after returning to in-person instruction was the perceived resurgence of favoritism. Students noted that this was not evident during virtual instruction, but reappeared during the 2021-22 school year. Javier noted:

> What demotivates me is probably the favoritism that some teachers have. And they'll say, 'No, there's no favoritism, I treat you all the same.' Like sometimes you'll just notice it, they'll treat you differently than they treat others, they'll let things slide for some students but not others.

When asked if he perceived this during virtual instruction as well, Javier replied, “It’s definitely more obvious this year.”

Ayanna also noted the issue of favoritism in her interview:

> I definitely don’t think there was favoritism during the virtual years because no one really knew each other. But now being back here, you see it. But I think it depends because some students are really outgoing, so they reach out to teachers, so the teachers know them more. So maybe it’s not exactly favoritism, but it can be frustrating when one person gets more attention than everyone else.

Spring 2021 data suggested that a major downside of virtual instruction was the superficial level of interaction between students and teachers, but Spring 2022 data suggests that there was perhaps a positive aspect of this low level of interaction: the perceived absence of favoritism. When teachers show favoritism, students’ sense of interpersonal relatedness is thwarted (Martin & Dowson, 2009).

Complacency and/or Gratitude

For several students, their sense of motivation did not recover after returning to in-person learning. Many reported feeling a sense of complacency or even apathy in regards to school, even if they felt they performed well during the virtual learning period or if they had positive feelings towards coming back to the school building. Three students – Reese, Ayanna, and Javier – discussed how they feel they are in a motivational rut that they are unsure how to get out of. They each expressed that they did not feel as motivated as they previously had during the 2021-22 school year, and what previous motivation they had has been replaced by a sense of complacency or apathy. Using the framework of SDT, this decrease in motivation may be explained by the fact that

students' psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness were not being met.

Reese, who had always prided themself on being an honors student, felt like the COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact on their motivation, leaving them with a sense of complacency that they had never experienced before:

> When I was in freshman year, I felt like I was always on top of things. I would turn in every single thing on time and then look for more to do, because I wanted to. And now I feel like I don't have patience, and assignments that I definitely could have done, I've gotten Fs on. What I'll do now is I'll look at my grades and think, can I afford this? Like I'm okay with letting my grades slip a little. And I'm okay with just chilling in class now.

Before virtual learning, it seems that Reese had a high level of intrinsic motivation, as evidenced by the fact that they were willing and able to complete additional work. According to Deci (1975), intrinsic motivation is demonstrated when there is no apparent reward for a behavior except the satisfaction of engaging in the activity itself. In Reese's case, there was no reward for completing additional work (such as extra credit) other than the sense of satisfaction they felt. SDT holds that the two most important psychological needs to foster a sense of intrinsic motivation are autonomy and competence (Deci & Ryan, 2000a). With this, it is apparent that Reese's needs of autonomy and competence were being met before virtual learning, but these needs were not being met during or after.

Ayanna had a similar experience. Having always been an honors student before the pandemic, she felt that she will never reach the level of motivation she had prior to virtual learning:

> I feel like sophomore year impacted this year. My grades [this year] weren't like really, really bad, but compared to like years prior – I used to get honors, but I didn't get it this year, at all. But I can't bring myself to care like I used to, and I don't know how to get myself there again.

Ayanna's comments underscore the fact that she lacked a sense of competence during and after virtual learning. Ayanna seems to gauge her competence based on grades and honor roll status. Not earning honor roll made her feel less competent, which would have impacted her intrinsic motivation. According to Deci, et. al. (2001), events that "decrease perceived competence will diminish intrinsic motivation" (p. 3).

Javier explained that the strategies he used to get through virtual learning inadvertently set him up for failure when returning to in-person instruction:

> I was just trying to pass [during virtual instruction]. Honestly, I was cheating. We all were. I thought, whatever, we're going to learn it eventually. Then we came back this year and had all these quizzes, all these tests. And I didn't know what to do. I was lost. It really affected my learning process this year.

It seems that Javier's sense of competence was thwarted when returning to in-person learning. The strategies he used in order to feel competent during virtual instruction did not translate to this context. This change may be explained by the Hierarchical Model of SDT, which posits that the environment (including social factors) influences major psychological needs, which in turn, influences motivation (Vallerand, 2000). In Javier's

case, the environment of virtual learning impacted his need to feel competent. During the 2020-21 school year, Javier's sense of competence was "just trying to pass," which he achieved by acting without high standards of academic integrity. During the 2021-22 school year, Javier gauged his sense of competence on his performance on assessments, on which he had to act with academic integrity. Thus, he no longer felt competent, and therefore, unmotivated.

Two students – Lucy and Ebony – felt that their motivation improved after returning to in-person learning because their experiences with virtual learning made them feel more grateful for a return to "normalcy." Said Lucy, a junior, of her experience: "I approach this year differently because now I'm valuing school more. Like, I'm in school, I'm actually getting the education that I need to get." When asked why she values her education, Lucy replied, "so I can be a role model for my siblings."

Like Lucy, Ebony discussed experiencing a sense of gratitude towards school post-pandemic:

> I feel like the captivity we had, we've broken free from all of that. Now my life literally revolves around school, and I'm motivated every single day. Whereas, when I was back in virtual school, my computer would literally stay there and I'd just go outside. My mom would get a call, but I didn't care. But now I'm in a charter school and this is a new experience for me. I feel like we can break free from what we had.

When asked what drives her to do well in school, Ebony stated that she is driven by her desire to "make something of herself."

It seems that Lucy and Ebony both value school because of how it fosters their sense of autonomy, or feeling that one's behavior is self-endorsed or volitional (Levesque, et. al., 2004). Autonomous behaviors have an internal perceived locus of control, meaning that the individual feels they are acting with agency (Ryan & Connell, 1989). Lucy and Ebony report being motivated in school because they believe it will help them achieve their future goals. Their behavior is therefore volitional.

However, feelings of complacency and gratitude can coexist, as evidenced by Justin's and Reese's experiences. Like Ebony, Justin also likened returning to school to being released from captivity, but unlike his former counterpart, mentioned that his motivation declined post-pandemic. Said Justin of virtual learning, "They'd just tell us, go do this stuff. It was so very depressing. It was like we were stuck in a cage. But ever since I came here and got to explore the place, as soon as I saw teachers, friends, I felt happy again. I actually started to do stuff." As for his motivation during the 2021-22 school year, Justin stated, "Ever since that whole virtual stuff, my motivation has gotten worse. I don't get anything over a C."

Reese also said that while they are happy about being back in school, they fear this newfound "normalcy" could be taken away again:

> [I felt motivated] my freshman year because I felt like I had so much that I had opportunities to do. Those opportunities were motivation for me. I really wanted to go on the overseas trip. But then, COVID happened and I realized anything could just be taken away from me.

Teacher Empathy and Emotional Investment

Another factor that impacted student motivation during and after the COVID-19 pandemic was whether or not they perceived a sense of empathy or emotional investment on behalf of their teachers. Some students noted that, during the virtual learning period, very few teachers made an effort to understand what was happening in students' lives on the other side of the screen. When discussing the amount of work assigned during the 2020-21 school year, Lucy added that teachers assigned work without regards to students' personal situations during the pandemic: "There was stuff at home [for us] that they probably knew that was happening, that was affecting us on a day-to-day basis, stuff that was affecting our motivation." When I asked Lucy if any teachers ever asked students what was happening in their personal lives during the COVID-19 pandemic, her response was, "No. We had 'coaches' that were supposed to meet with us, but sometimes they never showed up. So that was hard."

This lack of apparent emotional investment clearly impacted Lucy's need for relatedness, as she was deprived of feeling cared for in the virtual classroom. Lucy's experience with emotionally disengaged teachers is similar to the findings of a study by Anderson, et. al. (1976), which found that when children worked on an interesting activity in the presence of an adult who ignored the children's attempts to interact, the children's intrinsic motivation was diminished. According to SDT, intrinsic motivation is best fostered in environments with secure relatedness (Ryan & La Guardia, 2000), which Lucy did not experience during the 2020-21 school year.

Reese felt like the onus was on students to build relationships with teachers both during and after virtual instruction. While they felt their teachers were empathetic and

understanding during the pandemic, Reese felt that if they did not bring up their personal situation themself, their teachers would not have asked: “It was just expected. I was expected to communicate with my teachers about what was going on with me. But they never asked, like if something was late, they were never asking, ‘why was this?’ Or like, ‘why didn’t you do this assignment?’”

Returning to in-person instruction, several students expressed that many teachers continued to not extend enough empathy or emotional investment to students. Ebony and Ayanna, a freshman and junior respectively, discussed that several teachers had the tendency to make unfair comparisons between themselves and students, in particular, teachers comparing their own skills and expertise to that of their students. Ebony said:

> I don’t think enough teachers put themselves in our shoes. They’ll say something like, ‘oh yeah, I could have written this essay in one period.’ They have to understand that we are not the same. I feel like that kind of stuff brings me down to a low point. You are a teacher and you have whatever degree you have, and I don’t. We’re just coming back and it’s hard on us.

Ayanna brought up a strikingly similar perspective in her interview:

> Some teachers will say things like, ‘I could have done this in three minutes. It should take you three minutes as well.’ And I’m like, well, you studied for it for like sixteen years. I have this one teacher who will just, like, compare us to him [*sic*] in just a really intimidating way, like he’s really angry. It makes me feel like I don’t even want to try.

While Spring 2021 data pointed to the need for students to have meaningful interactions with a more knowledgeable other to sustain their motivation, Spring 2022

data underscores the need for the more knowledgeable other to be empathetic and understanding. Simply put, a return to in-person instruction in and of itself is insufficient in fostering better student motivation post-pandemic. Because children internalize the language and attitudes of more knowledgeable others (Grusec & Davidov, 2010), it is important that teachers are conscious of how they communicate with students.

Looking at this trend through the lens of social contagion theory, it seems that just as a positive motivational contagion may be powerful from teacher to student, a negative motivational contagion may also be powerful. When teachers convey anger or contempt towards their students, students may develop a sense of anger or contempt towards the teacher and the class as well. Just as Frenzel, et. al. (2009), found that teacher enjoyment influences student enjoyment over time, it seems the opposite is true as well.

Conclusions: Spring 2022

Despite suggestions made in Spring 2021 that student motivation would improve after returning to in-person instruction, many students' experiences did not reflect this. The following themes were the most significant in regards to student motivation post-pandemic: (1) negative feelings towards technology, (2) inconsistency and favoritism, (3) complacency and/or gratitude, and (4) teacher empathy and emotional investment. Many students reported feeling positively towards being back in the school building, yet had low motivation. However, a few students, while a minority, felt that their motivation did recover. As previously discussed, students' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness were not being met during virtual learning. Spring 2022 data showed they were also not being met during in-person instruction, for both the same and different reasons than the previous school year. Some of the issues that students lamented during

virtual instruction were remedied, such as technological difficulties and lack of opportunities to socialize and build relationships. However, other issues were not remedied, including a lack of teacher empathy and emotional investment. Additionally, new issues arose, including perceived inconsistency and favoritism. All in all, the transition back to in-person learning was challenging for every student interviewed.

Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the findings of the data collected from the study. Data collected in Spring 2021 and Spring 2022 helped to provide insight into the following two research questions:

1. What factors impacted students' perceptions of their motivation during emergency remote instruction?
2. What factors impacted students' perceptions of their motivation after returning to in-person instruction?

Self-determination theory, sociocultural theory, and social contagion theory provided a framework through which the data could be interpreted. Using these connected frameworks, it became apparent that relationships for these students are at the core of student motivation.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECCOMENDATIONS

This phenomenological, action research study explored the sociocultural and academic factors influencing student motivation during and after the period of emergency remote instruction necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. This chapter provides a summary of the research findings, considerations for my own teaching practice, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research.

Overview of the Study

This qualitative study used a phenomenological approach to examine the sociocultural and academic factors that influenced student motivation during the 2020-21 and 2021-22 school years. During both of these school years, students had to adjust to a "new normal" as they navigated distance learning, hybrid learning, and finally a return to in-person instruction. The phenomenon investigated is students' experiences of disruptions in their education due to the COVID-19 pandemic and how these disruptions impacted their motivation. This phenomenon relates to the problem of practice of low student motivation during and after the period of emergency remote instruction from March 2020 to June 2021. Data was collected from two focal groups – a 2020-21 focal group and a 2021-22 focal group – via open-ended surveys and semi-structured interviews. Each focal group consisted of six students who were chosen as a representative sample of the student population, for a total of twelve participants.

While a wide body of scholarship now exists on student motivation during remote instruction at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is still an emerging body of literature on change and continuity in these factors after the return to in-person instruction. This study seeks to address this gap in the literature. As this is an action research study, however, it is important to note that the findings of the study cannot be generalized beyond the scope of students in my own practice at Philadelphia Academy.

Research Questions

Considering the problem of practice, the two questions guiding this study were as follows:

1. What factors impacted students' perceptions of their motivation during emergency remote instruction?
2. What factors impacted students' perceptions of their motivation after returning to in-person instruction?

Summary and Discussion

This study sought to identify sociocultural and academic factors impacting student motivation during the past two school years, which were characterized by unprecedented challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A phenomenological approach was used because phenomenology is useful in analyzing subjective individual experiences with a phenomenon such as an important event or crisis (Mohajan, 2018). The phenomenon pertinent to this study is the COVID-19 pandemic itself as well as the resulting disruptions to students' education. Students' responses were analyzed through the lenses of three related theories: sociocultural theory (SCT), self-determination theory (SDT),

and social contagion theory. Relationships, a sense of helplessness, and a need for structure were consistent themes in both focal groups.

Research Question 1

What factors impacted students' perceptions of their motivation during emergency remote instruction?

The first research question focused on the experiences of the 2020-21 focal group, all of whom were in ninth grade at the time of the study. As such, all students had started their high school careers online, and most of them never stepped foot inside the school building for the entire school year, except for two students – Ada and Vanessa – who had participated in hybrid instruction from February to June 2020. There were five major themes identified in terms of factors impacting student motivation: (1) motivation as externally derived, (2) flexibility, (3) use of technology, (4) adjusting to a new reality, and (5) teacher affect and disposition. For the 2020-21 focal group, it seemed that students identified more external than internal factors that impacted their motivation. External factors included relationships, use of technology, and household context. Internal factors included a growing sense of frustration and helplessness.

It seemed that the most crucial aspect influencing student motivation was relationships, as this seemed to play a part in most themes enumerated above. Eddie and Angelica discussed the importance of deriving a sense of motivation from their interpersonal relationships, particularly from relationships with family and friends. Eddie looked to his mother for motivation, and Angelica looked to her best friend. In both instances, these interpersonal relationships were characterized by a feeling of security, support, and empathy. Students felt more motivated when their teachers exhibited these

same qualities, and conversely, felt less motivated when they felt teachers were demonstrating contempt, annoyance, or rigidness. For instance, Ada discussed the importance of teachers demonstrating empathy by being flexible with due dates and assignment completion. For Ada, when teachers acknowledged students' struggles and did not penalize students for them, this was a motivating factor. On the other hand, when students sensed that teachers were outwardly demonstrating frustration, students seemed to absorb that same feeling. Angelica reported feeling frustrated herself when a teacher abruptly ended a Zoom meeting after berating the class about their low participation. Social isolation also contributed to low student motivation. Darren and Ada talked about feeling depressed and apathetic towards school due to the fact that they were unable to meaningfully interact with friends.

A sense of helplessness and frustration was also pervasive during the remote instruction period. SDT holds that people become helpless when their needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness are not met (Deci & Ryan, 2000b). With that, and perhaps surprisingly given the number of studies linking use of technology to improved student motivation (Ayari, et. al., 2012; Mistler-Jackson & Singer, 2000), students identified technology as a hindrance to their motivation and a major source of this sense of helplessness. Several students reported feeling overwhelmed with online learning platforms and procedures, which contributed to a feeling of helplessness. For example, Ada asserted that they "have never been good with the online stuff" and felt like they would never be able to improve. Vanessa was frustrated with having to do work online rather than by hand, particularly in math class, and claimed that doing work on the computer was "torture for her eyes." Several students also reported feeling uncomfortable

using Zoom, particularly unmuting their microphones to speak aloud and having to keep their cameras on. Furthermore, a number of students did not have a reliable internet connection, which was another cause of frustration. Looking to SDT, the way technology was used during emergency remote instruction particularly thwarted students' needs of competence and autonomy, which according to Deci and Ryan (2017), are interconnected.

For most students, the COVID-19 pandemic itself was not a major source of stress, but the reality wrought by stay-at-home orders and school closures was. Most students found adjusting to a new reality difficult because of sociocultural factors such as their living conditions and household responsibilities. Many students shared that they did not have a quiet space to work because of the number of people in their households. This made them unable to focus, and as a result, unmotivated. Numerous students talked about needing to care for younger siblings, as parents needed to work while schools were closed. Students discussed how a lack of structure during this time had both positive and negative impacts on their motivation. While a small number of students found this liberating, a majority of students felt that they did not have the self-discipline needed to thrive in remote instruction. Students like Vanessa, Ada, and Angelica longed to return to the classroom setting, identifying the environment as a motivating factor.

Research Question 2

What factors impacted students' perceptions of their motivation after returning to in-person instruction?

Data from the 2020-21 focal group suggested that a return to in-person instruction could have the effect of improving student motivation, but data from the 2021-22 focal

group showed that a merely returning to "normal" did not have the desired effect. Most students interviewed reported feeling less motivated than they did before the pandemic. The themes identified in this phase of the study included (1) negative feelings towards technology, (2) inconsistency and favoritism, (3) complacency and/or gratitude, and (4) teacher empathy and emotional investment.

Again, relationships seemed to be the most critical factor influencing student motivation. Students had to feel like their teachers genuinely liked them in order to feel motivated, or they had to perceive a sense of secure relatedness (Ryan & La Guardia, 2000). Mere physical proximity to a more knowledgeable other – a teacher – was not in and of itself a solution for improving student motivation, because this did not automatically lend itself to relationship building. Students reported that few teachers demonstrated an investment in relationship building during remote instruction, and this trend sadly continued into the following school year. Lucy and Reese felt as if students did not make an effort to build relationships with teachers, most teachers would not take the initiative to do so. Ebony and Ayanna discussed how some teachers continued to demonstrate contempt towards students, admonishing them for not finishing tasks fast or thoroughly enough.

The sense of helplessness that plagued students during emergency remote instruction seemed to echo into the 2021-22 school year. For some students, this was in the form of complacency, which is associated with helplessness (Peterson, et. al., 1995). Students who had previously prided themselves on being high achievers no longer felt the need to go over and beyond in their own learning. For instance, Reese, an honors student, said that they had never been complacent with failing assignments before the remote

instruction period, and unfortunately that sense of complacency stayed with them after returning to in-person instruction. Similarly, Javier admitted to not acting with academic integrity during the remote instruction period, and now that the strategies he used out of the watch of teachers would no longer work, he felt helpless and frustrated.

The 2020-21 focal group reported missing a sense of structure and consistency, which was also true of the 2021-22 focal group. Students felt that the school could have done better in this regard when returning to in-person instruction. Eleventh and twelfth grade students reported that the school atmosphere was too relaxed, and policies and procedures were not uniformly enforced by staff. Students also discussed the issue of favoritism, which was not as obvious during remote instruction, but became more overt in students' eyes after returning to the school building. These phenomena adversely impacted student motivation.

Considerations for the Researcher-Practitioner

As we educators look towards rebuilding a sense of "normalcy" in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important for us to understand students' perspectives on what makes them feel motivated versus unmotivated. There were consistent themes in regards to student motivation during and after emergency remote instruction. With that, this study suggests that many of the factors adversely impacting student motivation are within teachers' control. As the central aim of action research is for practitioners to gain insight into the unique issues facing the students they serve (Efron & Ravid, 2013), I plan to use this knowledge to improve my practice during my tenure at Philadelphia Academy.

First and foremost, this study highlighted the need to be intentional in building relationships with students. This study showed that positive relationships with teachers

foster students' needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which are critical for fostering student motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000b). In my practice, I should always strive to demonstrate empathy towards my students by showing genuine interest in their lives, checking in with them regularly, and conveying a sense of warmth in the classroom. Participants conveyed the importance of teachers refraining from behaviors that indicate contempt or annoyance with students, disparagingly comparing students to themselves, and demonstrating favoritism. In my practice, I should be cognizant not to demonstrate any of these in order to build meaningful rapport with my students.

Second, this study underscored the importance of maintaining consistent classroom policies and procedures. Students do want a sense of structure at school, and they want that structure to be enforced fairly. When some teachers let certain students get away with bending or breaking school rules, students become less motivated to act in congruence with the school's expectations. For this reason, as a part of an educational team, I should have a clear idea of expectations and consequences that are agreed and collaborated on by myself and my peers, and I should work to make these clear to students on a regular basis. Consistency in enforcement is tied to building trust and relationships with students.

Third, this study showed that we should be mindful of how much we rely on technology in the classroom. Students have experienced technology fatigue since March 2020, and use of technology is not necessarily equated with greater motivation, as scholars have previously maintained (Ayari, et. al., 2012; Mistler-Jackson & Singer, 2000). Moving forward in my practice, I will be sure to seek and implement input from students on what their preferences with educational technology platforms are. I will also

work to use a combination of digital and hand-written assignments, and offer assignments in both digital and hand-written forms whenever possible.

Limitations

There are several limitations of this study that need to be addressed. The first is the small sample size used for this study. The primary reason for this was time constraints. During both school years, I had a limited amount of time in which I could conduct interviews. During the 2021-22 school year, interviews were conducted in-person, after school. This presented me with several constraints because the building was only open for an hour and a half after dismissal. Unlike the previous year, many students had extracurricular commitments that precluded them from participating in an interview. However, even with the number of extracurricular opportunities available, many students simply did not want to stay after school for anything. The sense of student apathy was apparent in the dwindling number of students participating in after-school clubs and tutoring, and this was seen in recruiting study participants as well.

Conducting interviews via Zoom presented several challenges during the 2020-21 school year. The first was the issue of internet connectivity. There were a number of instances in which the connection would drop, and students would be asked to repeat their answers to interview questions. I also did not have the benefit of observing students' nonverbal language, as I did not require them to have their cameras on during the interviews. I made this decision because many students expressed anxiety about having their cameras on for the interview, and in order to make it more appealing to students, I recorded audio only.

Another important limitation to address was that there were different participants used in 2020-21 and 2021-22. I attempted to interview the 2020-21 participants again the following school year, but only two of the six agreed to a second interview (the other four never responded to multiple inquiries I sent via school email). Perhaps this lack of interest was due to the fact that I was no longer their teacher and could not offer them credit for participating in the interview like I had the previous year. For this reason, I decided to look to my current students and shifted my focus to comparing the perspectives of freshmen with upperclassmen students (eleventh and twelfth graders). I definitely found more success recruiting students when I could offer them credit in return. For this reason, it is important to note that students who were extrinsically motivated by this reward were more likely to participate in the study during both years. It is also worth noting that the upperclassmen who participated in the 2021-22 focal group were recruited from my AP Psychology class. Because these students represent a specific academic demographic, the findings cannot be generalized to all students at Philadelphia Academy.

Recommendations for Future Research

The long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on student motivation will be studied for years to come. This action research study offers suggestions for trends and populations to investigate further as students continue to reacclimate to the school setting and adjust to the "new normal" of the post-pandemic world.

First, there should be a more nuanced focus on specific student demographics. Motivation among English language learners (ELLs) and students receiving special education services should be studied. Critical Race Theory (CRT) may offer an important lens through which to study the motivation of Black and Hispanic/Latinx students post-

pandemic, especially since COVID-19 most severely impacted communities of color (Blad, 2022). These studies would have important implications for social justice in education.

Differences and similarities in motivation among students who commenced their high school careers during or after virtual learning versus those who began high school before 2020 should be further studied. This was not the primary focus of this study, but this study does suggest that there are important patterns worth looking into in more detail in regards to these groups of differently socialized students. These trends may also be present among students who commenced different phases of schooling online versus in-person (elementary, middle, post-secondary, etc.).

Researchers should also examine the impact of teacher motivation on student motivation in the post-pandemic world. Studies should also evaluate the factors impacting teacher motivation after returning to in-person learning, as this study suggests there may be a motivational contagion effect from teacher to student that has also been observed in previous studies (Frenzel, et. al., 2009).

This study also suggests that parent/guardian involvement plays an important role in student motivation. This is another area of focus that should be further investigated through the lenses of CRT and social contagion theory.

Chapter Summary

This phenomenological action research study examined the factors impacting student motivation during and after emergency remote instruction. It identified factors that were unique to remote instruction and in-person instruction as well as factors that remained consistent between these two periods. This study analyzed data using the

frameworks of sociocultural theory (SCT), self-determination theory (SDT), and social contagion theory. Limitations of the study were discussed as well as suggestions for future research.

As educators press on into a "new normal," it is important to investigate students' perspectives in order to understand how to best support them as they also try to adjust to this new reality. Perhaps most importantly, this study suggests that many factors impacting student motivation are within teachers' control. These factors include conveying a sense of empathy to students, using supportive language in the classroom, enforcing consistent and fair policies and procedures, being responsive to students' preferences regarding use of technology, and providing students with choices in instructional activities. Indeed, as Angelica stated, "even the little things matter."

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APPENDIX A: STUDY CONSENT LETTER

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Your child has been invited to participate in a research study on student motivation and the COVID-19 pandemic. I will describe this study to you and your child and answer any of your questions. This study is being led by Jennifer Ferris, Department of Education at the University of South Carolina as part of the requirements for the Doctor of Education degree. The Faculty Advisor for this study is Dr. Todd Lilly, Department of Education at the University of South Carolina.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the ways in which students conceptualize and demonstrate motivation, engagement, and agency in the context of remote, hybrid and in-person learning, and how teachers can foster motivation, engagement, and agency among students in these different settings. In the wake of all-remote and hybrid learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic, one of the most voiced concerns among teachers and parents alike is the concern about learning loss and lack of student engagement. This study will examine the ways in which the transition to remote/hybrid learning impacted student motivation, and how teachers can best respond to students' learning needs and preferences.

Participant Role

Your student has completed a survey on their experiences with online and in-person learning which can be found [here]. I am also asking students to participate in a 30-minute interview conducted over Zoom about their experiences with remote/hybrid learning and their learning needs and preferences. Interview questions will be informed by your students' responses to the survey. Students may select a 30-minute window of their choice using Google Calendar.

Risks and Discomforts

We do not anticipate any risks of being involved in this research.

Benefits

Information from this study may be used to inform best practices in teaching students in the wake of the disruptions and adjustments of the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Compensation for Participation

Your student's interview will count as an exam grade. Your student will receive full credit for this assignment for participating in the interview.

Audio/Video Recording

Student interviews will be recorded through Zoom, so that the researcher can re-watch the interviews for analysis and coding purposes. Recordings will be kept on a

password-protected computer as encrypted MP4 files. The files will be deleted after 3 years.

Please sign below if you are willing to have this interview video and audio recorded through Zoom. You may still participate in this study if you are not willing to have the interview recorded.

- ☐ I do not want to have this interview recorded.
- ☐ I am willing to have this interview recorded:

Signed:_____
Date: _____

Privacy/Confidentiality/Data Security

Your student's name and your name will remain anonymous. Only the student's age, gender, and grade level will be reported in the study. All data will be kept on a password-protected computer. Data will be deleted after 3 years. We anticipate that students' participation in the survey presents no greater risk than everyday use of the Internet.

Please note that email communication is neither private nor secure. Though I am taking precautions to protect your privacy, you should be aware that information sent through e-mail could be read by a third party. Data may exist on backups and server logs beyond the timeframe of this research project.

Sharing Data Collected in this Research

De-identified data from this study may be shared with the research community at large. We will remove or code any personal information that could identify you before files are shared with other researchers to ensure that, by current scientific standards and known methods, no one will be able to identify you from the information we share. Despite these measures, we cannot guarantee anonymity of your personal data.

Voluntary Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary. You or your child may choose to cease participation in this study at any time for any reason.

Follow Up Studies

We may contact you again to request your participation in a follow up study. As always, your participation will be voluntary and we will ask for your explicit consent to participate in any of the follow up studies.

May we contact you again to request your child's participation in a follow up study?
☐Yes
☐No

Inquiries

The main researcher conducting this study is Jennifer Ferris, a graduate student the University of South Carolina and a high school social studies teacher at the Community Academy of Philadelphia. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Dr. Todd Lilly at lillyt98@mailbox.sc.edu. If you

have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a subject in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Human Participants at 803-777-6670 or access their website at https://sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/research_compliance/irb/index.php. Participants will receive an electronic copy of this form for their reference.

Statement of Consent

I have read the above information, and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study.

Student's Name (Printed): _____
Parent/Guardian's's Name (Printed): _____
Parent/Guardian Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX B: 2020-21 SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. What does “being motivated” mean to you?
2. How would you describe your motivation in school this past year (high, low, somewhere in between)? What factors increased or decreased your motivation?
3. Rate your stress regarding the COVID-19 pandemic.
    a. Very high
    b. High
    c. Somewhat high
    d. Moderate
    e. Somewhat low
    f. Low
    g. Very low
4. (Optional) Please elaborate on your answer to question 3.
5. Did you feel like your motivation was positively or negatively impacted by online learning? Explain.
6. What parts of online learning did you like? What did you dislike?
7. Do you think online learning has changed your attitude towards school? Explain.
8. What do TEACHERS do that makes you feel motivated/unmotivated? (Their attitudes, policies, classroom procedures - focus on the actions of the teacher, or things that are in the teacher's control?)

9. What do PARENTS/GUARDIANS do that makes you feel motivated/unmotivated?
10. How do you motivate YOURSELF?
11. What class do you feel MOST MOTIVATED in and why?
12. What class do you feel LEAST MOTIVATED in and why?

APPENDIX C: 2020-21 INTERVIEW SCRIPT

1. Tell me about yourself.
    a. What words would you use to describe yourself?
    b. How would you describe yourself as a student?
    c. What are your goals? What would you like to do after high school?
    d. What topics interest you most? What are you interested in learning?
    e. Who do you live with? How would you describe your family?
    f. Is there anything else you would want your teachers to know about you?
2. How does school fit into your life goals?
    a. How is school discussed in your family?
    b. Do you feel that school will help you achieve your life goals? Why or why not?
3. Can you talk about your experience with online learning this year?
    a. How has your school year gone?
    b. Has your attitude towards school changed since the COVID-19 pandemic? Explain.
    c. What words would you use to describe your experience with online learning last year?
    d. What did you like and dislike about online learning?
    e. What opportunities for socialization have you had this year?

4. Can you tell me about a time you felt motivated in school?
    a. What drove your actions or behaviors? Do you feel like you were motivated by grades? A desire to socialize? Learning new things? Future career goals? Public presentations of your work?
    b. What words would you use to describe your feelings during this time that you felt motivated?
5. Can you tell me about a time you felt unmotivated in school?
    a. What drove your actions or behaviors?
    b. What words would you use to describe your feelings during this time?
6. Can you talk about how confident you feel in achieving your goals at school?
    a. How do you feel when you are presented with a challenging task?
    b. What do you do when you feel overwhelmed or stressed by a task?
    c. What would help you feel more confident in achieving your goals at school?
7. Can you talk about your relationships with faculty/teachers?
    a. What kinds of interactions have you had with faculty/teachers this year?
    b. What words would you use to describe your relationship with faculty/teachers?
    c. How much connection do you feel between yourself and faculty/teachers?
    d. Does your attitude towards the teacher impact your motivation in class?
8. Can you talk about your perceptions of teacher attitudes and policies?
    a. Think about teachers in classes that you feel motivated versus unmotivated in. What words would you use to describe these teachers?

b. How do teachers demonstrate that they care about their students?

c. Describe the ideal teacher: their personality, teaching style, etc.

9. In thinking about your overall experience in school again, how much control do you feel like you have over your learning and education?

    a. How much do you feel like you are able to influence:

        i. What you learn about?

        ii. How you learn it?

        iii. How you are assessed on your learning?

    b. Can you think of any obstacles you experienced to having control over your learning and education in your school?

APPENDIX D: 2021-22 SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. What does “being motivated” mean to you?
2. How would you describe your motivation in school this past year (high, low, somewhere in between)? What factors increased or decreased your motivation?
3. Do you feel like you are more motivated than last year, less motivated, or do you feel the same level of motivation?
4. Did you feel like your motivation was positively or negatively impacted by online learning? Explain.
5. Describe your feelings about the pandemic last year and this year.
6. What parts of online learning did you like? What did you dislike?
7. What do you like about being back at school for in-person instruction? What do you dislike about it/?
8. Do you think your attitude towards school has changed since March 2020, or has it remained the same? Explain.
9. What do TEACHERS do that makes you feel motivated/unmotivated? (Their attitudes, policies, classroom procedures - focus on the actions of the teacher, or things that are in the teacher's control).
10. What do PARENTS/GUARDIANS do that makes you feel motivated/unmotivated?
11. How do you motivate YOURSELF?

12. What class do you feel MOST MOTIVATED in and why?

13. What class do you feel LEAST MOTIVATED in and why?

APPENDIX E: 2021-22 INTERVIEW SCRIPT

1. Tell me about yourself.
    a. What words would you use to describe yourself?
    b. How would you describe yourself as a student?
    c. What are your goals? What would you like to do after high school?
    d. What topics interest you most? What are you interested in learning?
    e. Who do you live with? How would you describe your family?
    f. Is there anything else you would want your teachers to know about you?
2. How does school fit into your life goals?
    a. How is school discussed in your family?
    b. Do you feel that school will help you achieve your life goals? Why or why not?
3. What has your experience in school been like this year?
    a. How has your school year gone?
    b. Has your attitude towards school changed since the COVID-19 pandemic? Explain.
    c. What words would you use to describe your experience with online learning last year?
    d. What did you like and dislike about online learning?
    e. What did you like and dislike about being back in school this year?

f. What opportunities for socialization have you had this year? How have these been different from last year?

4. Can you tell me about a time you felt motivated in school?
    a. What drove your actions or behaviors? Do you feel like you were motivated by grades? A desire to socialize? Learning new things? Future career goals? Public presentations of your work?
    b. What words would you use to describe your feelings during this time that you felt motivated?
5. Can you tell me about a time you felt unmotivated in school?
    a. What drove your actions or behaviors?
    b. What words would you use to describe your feelings during this time?
6. Can you talk about how confident you feel in achieving your goals at school?
    a. How do you feel when you are presented with a challenging task?
    b. What do you do when you feel overwhelmed or stressed by a task?
    c. What would help you feel more confident in achieving your goals at school?
7. Can you talk about your relationships with faculty/teachers?
    a. What kinds of interactions have you had with faculty/teachers this year? How is this different from last year?
    b. How is your relationship with teachers this year different from last year?
    c. What words would you use to describe your relationship with faculty/teachers?
    d. How much connection do you feel between yourself and faculty/teachers?

e. Does your attitude towards the teacher impact your motivation in class?

8. Can you talk about your perceptions of teacher attitudes and policies?
    a. Think about teachers in classes that you feel motivated versus unmotivated in. What words would you use to describe these teachers?
    b. Do you feel like teachers' expectations have been fair and clear these past couple of years?
    c. How do teachers demonstrate that they care about their students?
    d. Describe the ideal teacher: their personality, teaching style, etc.
9. In thinking about your overall experience in school again, how much control do you feel like you have over your learning and education?
    a. How much do you feel like you are able to influence:
        i. What you learn about?
        ii. How you learn it?
        iii. How you are assessed on your learning?
    b. Can you think of any obstacles you experienced to having control over your learning and education in your school?